

Beyond Bhakti Steps Ahead...



Govindaswamy Rajagopal

Sun International Publishers

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Published by

Sun International Publishers

PG-105, Possangipur

Janakpuri, New Delhi-110 058

Mobile: 9999500276

Email: suninternational1989@gmail.com

© 2016 Govindaswamy Rajagopal (b. 1960)

First published (Hardbound) in the year 2007

ISBN: 81-7646-510-0

B.R. Publishing Corporation

(A Division of BRPC (India) Ltd.)

425, Nimri Colony, Ashok Vihar, Phase IV,

Delhi-110 052

ISBN: 978-81-928130-3-5

Rs. 495/-

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Dedicated to my Beloved Guru
Prof. Pon. Sourirajan,
a fine human being and a great teacher
who taught Bhakti to me.

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Foreword

I am pleased to write the foreword to this Book titled “**Beyond Bhakti**”, authored by my colleague G. Rajagopal, who teaches Bhakti literature to post-graduate students under Comparative Literature Programme. I was fortunate to listen personally to some of the papers of this book in the weekly seminars of our department. I found the papers interesting and informative on the theme of Bhakti. It is a mine of information to the students pursuing the theme of Bhakti cult about the socio-religious milieu of South India where it originally emerged as a reformative cult against the then existing Vedic religious customs and practices.

The present book, written with comparative perspectives, is exciting and appealing. The papers, especially on Jāttirai of Purāriyamman and Kāmadeva, shed more light on various customs and beliefs of village people where religion is more than a faith. Rajagopal’s choice of issues and analysis in this book are fascinating and kindle social awareness. I am sure the book would be useful for non-Tamil people particularly to the students and scholars, who are interested in the field of folklore and Bhakti.

I wish success to Dr. G. Rajagopal for his sincere academic attempt and his intellectual effort.

Indira Goswami

Professor of Assamese (Retired)

Department of Modern Indian and Languages
and Literary Studies, University of Delhi.

Preface

Though Comparative Literature is now an established branch of literary criticism, very few critics try its application while understanding, appreciating and evaluating literary processes. It is not a desirable situation, since Comparative Literature is the most appropriate method for analyzing literary processes. In the words of Prof. Amiya Dev, it gives us “a pattern of various colours with links if one looks for them, but more than that, every single colour with an added common tinge.” Ernst R. Curtius has ridiculed the non-comparative study of literature as “The pigeon holes of Universities”. It is all right in theory, however, very few of the so-called advocates of Comparative Literature actually implement their viewpoint in applied criticism.

On this background, it is quite heartening that Dr. G. Rajagopal has approached various facets of the Bhakti Movement from comparative aspect here in this book. His treatment has given the analysis vital importance from the point of view of students and scholars of the Bhakti movement as well as those of the Comparative study of literature. Rajagopal has chosen the socio-cultural milieu of the southern India for his investigation. Consequently, he uses the methods of the textual analysis, the survey of literary histories, the exploration of folk traditions and the interpretation of social structures all with the base of comparative studies.

The choice and order of Rajagopal's investigation is meaningful. He begins with the interpretation of the Jāttirai festival of Purāriyamman, digging deep into folkloric tradition and substantiating his findings by sociological and philosophical explanations. Then he takes up the study of Kāmaṇ Kadaippāḍal, comparing two different traditions regarding the myth of Kāmaṇ. Apt use of comparative literary (*Lāvaṇī* in Marathi and Tamil literary traditions), philosophical (*Karma* theory), psychological (Dreams and Omens) and sociological (Customs) interpretations enriches the study in his treatment. This is followed by a detailed and complete comparison of Tamil Siddhas and Vīraśaiva Śaraṇas. Similarities and differences between these two exponents of the Bhakti from two different linguistic regions of India are brought forward from literary, sociological and philosophical comparisons all fused into one. Then there is a detailed comparison between two great personalities, Basaveśvara from Karnataka in the 12th Century and Rāmalinga swāmi from Tamil Nadu in the 19th Century. Both these men remoulded the Bhakti in revolutionary social crusade. Next comes reorganization of Bhakti movement as attempted by the cult of 'Vaḷḷalār' Rāmalinga swāmi in the nineteenth century. Here the social component becomes more conspicuous and important. Finally, the case of Nandaṇār, a *dalit bhakta* either lured or cheated or forcibly thrown into fire by upper-caste Brahmins, as depicted in different literary creations. Here the comparison is more from the point of view of social component rather than literary one. A gradual shift in the positions of the writers from the ninth century to the twentieth century is explained with social overtones. Rajagopal looks at Bhakti not just as a literary movement or as a purely changing pattern of philosophical standpoints and religious practices, but as a powerful force inducing social change and cultural heritage. Though he makes use of literary, philosophical and psychological analysis, his

intention is to go beyond these branches of study and find out something vitally important for the social upliftment of the people. That is why he titles his book as “**Beyond Bhakti**”. In choosing the topics of his investigation, he has selected the festivals, myths and literary creations which are not much known to non-Tamil readers thereby arousing their interest, while his method of investigation and the treatment he applies not only sustains that interest but enlightens them towards a different unknown dimension. As a perfect studious scholar, he adopts a non-assuming posture and balanced attitude in his analysis.

I sincerely congratulate Dr. G. Rajagopal for his scholarly endeavour and wish him further success in his quest for knowledge.

Nishikant D. Mirajkar

Professor of Marathi
Department of Modern Indian Languages
and Literary Studies, University of Delhi.

Author's Point

I have the privilege of being a beloved student of Prof. Pon. Sourirajan under whose inspiring teaching and able guidance, I acquired inquisite knowledge on *Bhakti*. It is he who really instilled the interest in me to pursue the path of *Vaḷḷalār* Rāma-linga swāmi in studies and observance in my personal life. As I understood *Bhakti* as an emotional response to God and thereby loving fellow-human beings and worldly creatures, I am really fascinated over the teachings of *Vaḷḷalār* and *Siddhas* as their *Bhakti* showed 'the true treasure' i.e. 'Spiritual Realization' which is more important than the mundane ritualistic one. These mystics, who were not ordinary mendicants seeking for their personal salvation but were initiators of a new path for the entire humanity. They perceived the Universe as an expression of the Beauty of God, love as the gravitational principle that binds all the living things with each other where caste, creed, status, sex, and so on, do not matter.

This book is an outcome of my effort to prepare teaching materials for the course on Bhakti for the M.A. Programme of Comparative Indian Literature. While teaching the course I realized that there is a striking similarity between *Vaḷḷalār* and Basavēśvara in particular and *Siddhas* of Tamil Nadu and the *Vīraśaiva Śaraṇas* of Karnataka in general. I have made an attempt to highlight common features of them in the third and fourth chapters. Similarly, while understanding the socio-religious milieu of **Bhakti Movement of Tamil Nadu** (A.D. 600–900), I felt that similar socio-cultural and historical events have played the role in the emergence of '*Vaḷḷalār Cult*' of 19th century. Hence, I have documented that information in the fifth chapter. The last chapter on the

episode of Nandaṇār, is meant to analyse the creation and recreation of a *dalit Śaiva bhakta*, in literature and his relevance to the modern Tamil society. I have tried to bring out certain facts and figures on the legend of Nandaṇār, narrated by a host of authors and the socio-religious and political situations of their time and compulsion. In the first two chapters, I have dealt with the unique *bhakti* sentiment of folk people of my native place named Tiruttani with the first-hand knowledge and information to highlight its specific nature. On the whole, I have tried to highlight aspects of '*beyond bhakti*' i.e. other than the so-called *Bhakti* sentiments and practices. Some of the papers have already been published in some journals and books which are further edited and updated presently in this work.

In my present endeavour, my senior colleague Professor **Nishikant D. Mirajkar** has devoted his precious time in enriching the book by sharing his scholarly insights and information on *Bhakti*. I acknowledge my sincere gratitude to him for his thought provoking preface and as well as for all his help. I express my heartfelt thanks to Prof. **Indira Goswami**, Jnan Pith Awardee, for supporting me in the publication of book and also for introducing this work. I also take this opportunity to thank my colleague Prof. **A. Mariappan**, who actively took part in discussions and provided meaningful suggestions regarding certain issues of *Bhakti*.

I would be failing in my duty if I do not acknowledge Mr. **P. Madaswamy**, an Assistant Librarian of our University, who helped me through thick and thin in the proof reading and for necessary language perfection of this book.

I owe my special thanks to my Guru **Pon. Sourirajan** for his constant encouragement and support being available throughout my life, to whom I dedicate this work with utmost gratitude.

A sincere attempt has been made to achieve consistency in the matter of transliteration of the numerous Tamil and Sanskrit terms. I seek for the readers' pardon if there are any inconsistencies in my attempt.

Govindaswamy Rajagopal

Abbreviations

A.D.	=	<i>Anno Domini</i> i.e. “in the year of the Lord” (Christ)
B.C.	=	Before Christ (Era)
c.	=	<i>circa</i> i.e. “approximately”
cf.	=	<i>confer</i> < <i>conferre</i> means “compare” or “see also”
Ed.	=	Editor
Eds.	=	Editors
ed.	=	edition
e.g.	=	<i>exempli gratia</i> i.e. “for example”
EM	=	E. Murugayyaṇ
<i>et al.</i>	=	<i>et alii</i> i.e. “and others”
<i>etc.</i>	=	<i>et cetera</i> i.e. “and other things”, or “and so forth”
GKB	=	Gōpāla Krishṇa Bhārati
<i>Ibid.</i>	=	<i>Ibidem</i> i.e. “in the same place”
<i>i.e.</i>	=	<i>id est</i> means “that is”
IP	=	Indira Pārthasārathy
MCJ	=	M.C. Jeyaparakāsam
NCK	=	<i>Nandaṇār Carittirak Kīrttaṇai</i>
NSK	=	N.S. (Nāgercōil Suḍalaimuttu) Krishṇaṇ
<i>Op.cit.</i>	=	<i>Opere citato</i> i.e. “in the work cited”
p.	=	page
pp.	=	pages
PPK	=	<i>Parāparakkaṇṇi</i>
Pub.	=	Publisher
Rpt.	=	Reprint
ŚVR	=	<i>Śivavāḱkiyar</i>
Skt.	=	Sanskrit
TAP	=	<i>Tiru-Aruṭpā</i>

TMM = *Tirumandiram*

Tr. = Translation

viz. = namely

Chapter – 1

***Jāttirai* Festival of Purāriyamman: The Visiting Goddess of Tiruttaṇi*.**

The worship of the village gods is the most ancient form of Indian religion. Before the Aryan invasion, which probably took place in the second millennium B.C., the old inhabitants of India, who are sometimes called Dravidians, were a dark-skinned race, with religious beliefs and customs that probably did not greatly differ from those of other primitive races. They believed the world to be peopled by a multitude of spirits, good and bad, who were the cause of all unusual events, and especially of diseases and disasters. The object of their religion was to propitiate these innumerable spirits. At the same time, each village seems to have been under the protection of someone spirit, who was its guardian deity.**

- Henry Whitehead

Tuesdays and Fridays are the most auspicious days in the religious pursuit of Tamil people. The former is identified with the worshipping of the Goddesses, while the latter is identified with the God Murugaṇ. Especially all the Tuesdays of *Āḍi* month (mid-July to mid-August), the fourth month in the Tamil year calendar, are so auspicious for the worshipping of the Goddesses, belonging to both the *mārga* (Great) and *deśi* (Little) traditions. On any one of the Tuesdays of the *Āḍi* month, the *grāma devata* i.e. Village Goddess **Taṇigai Minākshiyamman**, popularly other-wise

known as **Purāriyamman**, visits Tiruttani, a town in the Tiruvallūr District of Tamil Nadu and an annual folk festival known as *Jāttirai* (*Yātra* > *Jātra* (Sanskrit) > *Jāttirai* (Tamil) is celebrated in her honour.

Tiruttani is a town situated in between Chennai and Tirupati on the Mumbai Railway route. It is 84 Kms. away from North West Chennai and prominently known for bringing forth one of her foremost sons, the man universally appreciated for his scholarship, namely Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, the great teacher of philosophy who served as the President of India between May 1962 and May 1967. And it is the fifth *paḍai vīḍu* (means here Temple) of Lord Murugaṇ, who stayed here after destroying the demon *Sūrapadman*.¹ Tanigai Mīṇākshiyamman – the wife of Lord Śiva, is the mother of Lord Gaṇesa and Lord Murugaṇ (known as Kārtik/Skanda/Subramaṇiya in *purāṇas* of great tradition). Both the mother and the younger son Lord Murugaṇ have their own great festivals being celebrated at Tiruttani in the month of *Āḍi*. It is the *Jāttirai* festival in the case of the former and the *Āḍi Kiruttigai* festival (Skt. *Kārtika* > *Kārtigai* > *Kiruttigai* (Tamil) i.e. the day of Kārtigai star of *Āḍi* month considered sacred to Lord Murugaṇ) in the case of the latter, which are very popular even today. The town being the Taluk headquarter for 65 villages, consists of nearly 2 lakhs of population. Before 1956 it was a part of Chittoor District of Andhra Pradesh and later became the north border region of Tamil Nadu State. With its narrow *terus* (Streets) originally once called after the caste names, the *Ūr* – the dwelling place of people (village/ town), is referred to as ‘*Kīl Tiruttani*’ (East or lower Tiruttani) which is formed at the bottom of the Lord Murugaṇ Temple. The west or the upper part of the temple’s dwelling region is called ‘*Mēl Tiruttani*’. The lower part of the temple’s thickly populated region is called *Kīl Tiruttani*. This *Ūr* (Village/Town) was once having five streets known as *Redḍiyār Teru* (the street of a land owning community of

Andhra origin), *Agamuḍaiya Mudaliyār Teru* (the street of a land owning community of Tamil Nadu), *Kammālar Teru* (the street of goldsmiths (of the origins of Andhra Pradesh) and blacksmiths (of the origins of Tamil Nadu), *Pārppār Teru* (the street of Brahmins of both Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu origin) and *Kōmuṭṭit Teru* (the street of business community of Andhra origin) or *Kaḍait Teru* (the Bazaar street). These are the streets that contribute much to the socio-cultural and economic life of Tiruttani even today.

Besides being famous for *Āḍi Kiruttigai* of Lord Subramaṇiya swāmy Temple, Tiruttani is also popular for *Tī Midippu Viḷā / Nerupput Tirunāl Viḷā* – the Fire-walking festival of Draupatiamman shrine and the *Jāttirai* festival of Purāriyamman shrine. The *Tī Midippu Viḷā / Nerupput Tirunāl Viḷā* is conducted every year by *Agamuḍaiya Mudaliyār* community people whereas the *Jāttirai* is conducted by the *Reḍḍiyār* community people since a long time. Strategically and very conveniently, the two dominant agrarian communities took hold of these popular folk festivals to demonstrate their strength and power in Tiruttani.

Jāttirai of *Taṇigai Mīṇākshiyamman / Purāriyamman* ignites Tiruttani during the month of *Āḍi*, a period of dry, searing heat, huge wind and severe dust, in the past of raging epidemics, yet also the moment when transplanted rice shoot up in the paddy fields are about to sprout in anticipation of the monsoon rains. Her visit is explicitly related to human fertility, the fertility of the soil, bringing rain, protection against disease and general well being (Handelman 1995: 284). *Taṇigai Mīṇākshiyamman* (Purāriyamman) moves in with the community of *Reḍḍiyārs* which every year arranges her sojourn in Tiruttani, with the aid and support of other communities' people. In her homecoming visit, the Goddess comes into unmediated and close contact with the people of this village especially with the women folk. The story of the Goddess reveals that she was once a member of their community and being closer to them she acted as the guardian all through the years.

Purāriyamman's Story

Once upon a time, there were two sisters namely Mīṇākshi and Piḍāri who lived somewhere near Tiruttāṇi. They were married off at their proper age. The elder sister Mīṇākshi luckily married a wealthy land-lord of Tiruttāṇi and lived like a queen. However, there was not much happiness in her married life since she was childless. But the younger sister Piḍāri who got married to a small farmer (who lived in a village at western region nearby Tiruttāṇi) led a happy life for some time and in due course she was blessed with seven daughters. However, after some days a famine struck their village and many people and cattle lost their lives in the calamity. The remaining people became poor and left the village in search of better lives elsewhere. Piḍāri's family too was badly affected. With no other choice, she went to her elder sister's place with her children. She and the children walked barefoot crossing the small hill and thorny bushes. The children were unable to walk for such a long distance and also due to severe hunger they cried. But she was helpless. However, she plucked some mango and tamarind fruits from the trees enroute and appeased their hunger to some extent. She quenched their thirst by providing the river water to their little mouths. After the long painful journey, she reached her elder sister's house at Tiruttāṇi. She knocked the door and it was opened by none other than her sister. The sister Mīṇākshi shocked to see Piḍāri in such a pathetic condition with the withering seven children. She welcomed her wholeheartedly into the house and immediately provided food and other necessary comforts to them. Children as much grieved in empty stomach swallowed the food disorderly and scattered here and there, thereby they ruined the beauty of the house. This had become a nuisance and it was a regular business of the children. Day by day their hubbub became intolerable. Even then, the elder sister bore their unruly behaviour in the interest of her sister Piḍāri, though she was indeed quite unhappy.

On her part, Piḍāri in fact tried to discipline them however unsuccessfully. She was helpful to her sister in managing the household works. But her children made every thing into mess and changed the house into a slaughter house. It was raining one day heavily. The children, not in a position to go outside, excreted in the home itself. All was hell and subsequently, Mīṇākshi became irritated and annoyed. So, she shouted at the children for their ill-behaviour. The frightened children cried in shrilling voices and their mother rushed to them immediately. There ensued an argument over the petty incident between the sisters. It went out of their control and they blamed each other for the utter mess. Piḍāri, out of anger and frustration, humiliated the elder sister and uttered that she was a barren lady hence thereby she could not bear the little nuisances of children. Shell-shocked Mīṇākshi, unable to digest the humiliation and accusation became utterly sad and started leaving the house in haste. Piḍāri soon realized the mistake and begged for her pardon. But, the wounded Mīṇākshi didn't heed her request and rather abruptly proceeded towards the western region that too in the heavy raining and dark night all alone. She just walked all along the adjoining left side passage of the Nandi River. At last after passing over a five kilometer of distance, her anger subsided at a particular place called Pandikkuppam and she stayed on there alone.

She took shelter under the shadow of neem tree surrounded by thorny bushes. Meanwhile the rain continued for days together in Tiruttāṇi village and reportedly there were many deaths of humans and cattle. The village people strongly felt that the unfortunate natural calamity happened only due to the anger of Mīṇākshi, who left the village in disgust and despair. Almost immediately they believed that the woman Mīṇākshi was not an ordinary lady but Goddess. So, the next day (happened to be Tuesday), the *grāma adhikāri* (Village Munsif), *nāṭṭāṇmai* (Leader of village community), *kaṇakkuppillai* (Village Accountant), *etc.* along with some

prominent people proceeded to her place. They narrated about the unfortunate incidents that happened in the village after her leaving. So they all pleaded for her return and permanent stay at her house. They told her that they wish to sweep and keep not only her house neat and clean but also the whole village. They submitted their appeal requesting her to visit the village after a week so that they can do all the necessary works before her arrival. She accepted their appeal. The people were satisfied and then returned to the village in the evening. On the order of the *grāma adbhikāri*, a *tōṭṭi* (Untouchable village sweeper) proclaimed about her arrival. He informed the village people to keep their house and surroundings clean and stay away from any kind of pollutions. The younger sister Piḍāri too started cleaning the house daily once and also saw that her children maintain the house in hygienic condition. People tucked in a bunch of neem leaves on the top of their houses. After a week exactly on the Tuesday, the village people decorated their streets with the festoon of neem leaves. They went to the place of Mīṇākshi in the morning and offered their sincere obeisance to her. Being satisfied Mīṇākshi quite happily joined them in the procession. After crossing over four kilometer of distance of rough passage surrounded of bushy thorns, they finally reached the plain land adjacent to the village Tiruttāṇi. Then, on the way, while proceeding towards east, she sympathetically saw every one and went on moving further with hundreds of people. As her place was fast approaching she deliberately slowed down her steps since her original interest was only to soothe the village people, who suffered in the heavy rain just before. So she was very determined not to visit her house at any cost. When she was nearing her house, she just refused to move further. The people put all their efforts to take her into the home however unsuccessfully. She finally once again went away from there (of course on the inconvenience of sharing the same residence again with her sister and her children with

whom she quarreled earlier) and proceeded in the same route to her place. Thereafter, she stood as the protecting Goddess on the western boundary region of the village. The younger sister, by facing the eastern direction, took charge of protecting the people from all bad elements. Thereafter people started worshipping them as their protecting Goddesses. Thus, the festival came to be known as **Purāriyamman Jāttirai** (Skt. *Jātra* meaning pilgrimage/ journey) since the Goddess Taṇigai Mīṇākshiyamman popularly known as Purāriyamman performs the journey from her place ritually every year to the village during the *Āḍi* month.

Here it is to be noted that Lord Śiva is known by various names due to several reasons. Out of which he is referred as Tripurāntakan since he killed the three demons called Tripura and reduced their three magic cities to ashes. So he has been referred also as *Purāri*. This term later came to refer his consort Mīṇākshi also. Etymologically the word Purāriyamman can be divided into Purāri+Amman, that is, ‘The mistress of Purāri’, otherwise ‘The wife of Purāntakan’. This term is colloquially now-a-days addressed as ‘Porāriyamman’, again with some reason. As Mīṇākshi went out of her home originally on disgust and despair with intolerance thus she had become known as Porāriyamman. The word ‘*porār*’ in Tamil means ‘the state of intolerance’ and ‘*i*’ is a suffix denoting ‘the female gender’ like in the cases of Rājeshvari, Parameshvari and Sundari *etc.* The word *amman* means a village goddess. This is the village goddess worshipped by *Reḍḍi* community² (known as *Reḍḍiyār* community in Tamil Nadu) which had many centuries back – during the reigning of Vijayanagara Empire *i.e.* A.D. 1336–1646) – migrated into Tamil Nadu from Andhra Pradesh. Its adjoining towns in Andhra Pradesh are celebrating the *Jāttirais* for their own Goddesses. Out of all the festivals, Gangammā *Jātra* of Tirupati is very popular among the people. Dēsammā of Nagari, Periyapālaiyattammā of Periyapālaiyam and Karumāriyamman of

Tiruvērkaḍu are some of the folk goddesses who have wide popularity in various communities.

Purāriyamman in Tiruttaṇi

Mīṇākshi and Piḍāri seem to have one entity as the consorts of Lord Śiva. In the great tradition it is Mīṇākshi, whereas it is Piḍāri³ in the folk tradition. Both Mīṇākshi and Piḍāri are described as the elder and younger sisters respectively. Exactly in the same way Mīṇākshi is barren whereas Piḍāri is a mother of seven girl children. She virtually takes care of the village and faces the east, the auspicious and beneficial direction of the rising sun.

Taṇigai Mīṇākshiyamman, *i.e.* Purāriyamman has occupied just a platform in the western boundary of Tiruttaṇi in a village called Pandikkuppam. She has no shrine or any form of her own (except in a small black stone head) whereas her sister Piḍāri has a shrine in the eastern boundary region. The Goddess Piḍāri was once a small stone raised a little on a platform; later the place was covered with a thatched roof with muddy walls on all sides. Now she has a well-structured temple. The temple is situated at the eastern part of the village. In the idol form Piḍāri sits as the protecting Goddess with her seven daughters facing towards the eastern direction and takes care of the people of Tiruttaṇi. Her feet are pointed to the front and placed in the courtyard outside the shrine. Her seven virgin children called *Ēlu Kaṇṇigaḷ* are equated with *Sapta Mātās/Seven Mātrikās*⁴ of great tradition.

The make-shift platform of Mīṇākshi is located in the remote region of western boundary surrounded by thorny bushes. By the virtue of *Jāttirai*, she actually comes to occupy the central place in the *Periya Teru* (Big Street) as the Goddess of ‘middle-of-the street’ *i.e.* as *Ellaikkal*⁵ (the boundary stone representing the Goddess of the periphery) in Tiruttaṇi. Her middle status is very

significant as any one going towards western direction on any business tends to seek her blessings and set out his/her foot. As quoted by Handelman (1995: 286): “Streets, and especially intersections in south India, are perceived as loci of movement between cosmic planes, and therefore require special guardianship against undesired intrusions. The ‘middle’ also connotes a cosmic axis (*e.g.* Mount *Meru*), an earth navel (*e.g.* the *Śiva lingam*) or the *garbhagrha*, the ‘womb house’ or innermost sanctum of a deity within its temple home (Lannoy 1971: 40)⁶ or, one may well add, within itself”. Mīṇākshi’s ‘middle’ qualities also connote the innerness of domestic space and family intimacy. Domestic rituals within the household to this Goddess call her ‘middle-of-the house *Taṇigai Mīṇākshiyamman/Purāriyamman*’ as every house usually worships her during evening times and also at difficult and diseased periods. Piḍāri lives in the shrine in Tiruttani, with a courtyard precinct of corresponding size. She is on the eastern periphery of the village protecting people against diseases. Both are not angry goddesses. They do not fit into the category of violent South Indian Goddesses rather act as the twin mothers of their children.

Descriptions of angry Indian goddesses attribute their violence to the absence of a consort (*e.g.* Babb 1970)⁷. Many of these goddesses are ferocious conquerors until tamed, married, and made docile and passive in relation to their husbands (*e.g.* Fuller 1980; Shulman 1980; Ramanujan 1986)⁸. By contrast, the marital status of Mīṇākshi and Piḍāri is not an issue of any importance. Both wear *tālis* (Nuptial cords), but there is no ritual act in the *Jāttirai* that explicates or implicates their marriage. Their wearing the *tāli* may be linked first and foremost to their domesticity, rather than to the issue of marital status.

The location and ethos of these Goddesses Mīṇākshi and Piḍāri shrines show the same Goddess in the middle or centre and at the periphery. The differences between the two are of degree, of loca-

tions on a continuum of female being and power with perhaps a certain division of labour amongst them. Purāriyamman is a powerful, independent female in her own right. Without a consort, she is 'very much the mistress of her feelings and actions' (Hanchett 1988: 187)⁹. Through its sequential progression her *Jāttirai* increasingly brings into focus a cosmos that exfoliates her being.

Purāriyamman Comes Home

Every year during *Āṇi* month (mid-June and mid-July), the *grāma adhikāri*, *nāṭṭāṇmai*, *kaṇakkuppiḷḷai* and other prominent people assemble at the temple premise and finalize the conducting of the *Jāttirai* festival of the village Goddess Purāriyamman. Though it is the festival conducted for the women deities, no woman takes part in the discussion. It is only the male members who decide everything. After finalizing the exact day and date, the trustees employ the *tōṭṭi* for the formal proclamation called *Ūccārru* (> *Ūccāṭṭu*). Then they collect the fund known as *pirivuk kaṭṭaṇam* (Formal fee collected from each house) from the village houses and some amount of donations from the shopkeepers and businessmen. They arrange the performances of the traditional folk theatre called *Terukkūttu*¹⁰ and *Karagāṭṭam* (Acrobatic folk dance) troupes to perform on the festival day. Some one would be entrusted with the responsibility of making the *karagam* (A pot decorated with flowers and colourful cloths symbolically representing the folk deity) and decoration of the Goddess of the shrine. The *karagam* carrying ceremony is performed every year and attracts immense crowds of excited sightseers. The central figure of the ceremony is the priest who, as he madly trips along with the sacred weight over his head, like a high tiara decorated with flowers, is closely followed by a select number of men – the supposed attendant deities – with drawn swords in their hands (Sastri 1974: 227).

Either the first or second Tuesday of *Ādi* month, the *grāma adhikāri*, the *nāṭṭaṇmai*, the *kaṇakkuppiḷḷai*, the trustees along with some people visit the place of Mīṇākshiyamman. They reach the shrine accompanied by a few drummers playing the folk music in a rousing rhythm. They all meet the Goddess and make her happy by sacrificing goats, cocks besides the usual offerings such as flowers, fruits and the *pongal* – the fresh rice cooked with the jaggery without draining the water. Eventually, they invite her to visit the village the next Tuesday so that they could make her happy. Women have a greater role than the men in performing the rituals of *Jāttirai* domestically. Some people offer *kūḷ* (Porridge made out of broken rice and ragi powder) to the public. Then for the following one week every day a *pūjāri* from non-Brahmin community along with assistants performs needful rituals for the goddess and go with the *karagam* of deity to all the streets. It is from the *Redḍiyār* community that three people go for the ritual called *kāppu kaṭṭudal* in order to take care of *karagam*, *triśūlam* and sword. *Vaṇṇāṇ* (Washerman) accompanies the *karagam* all the days holding the torch light in his hand. People pour water to the feet of the persons who hold *karagam*, *triśūlam* and sword. An assistant gives some amount of *mañcal* and *kungumam* (turmeric and vermilion) powder as the sacred *prasādams* (offerings of deity) to the people for applying on their forehead.

On the *Jāttirai* day, people tuck in bunches of neem leaves on the top of their roofs of the houses and decorate their streets by the festoon of neem leaves. Every one after taking bath goes to the temple of Piḍāri and offers the tasty dish *pongal* along with the coconut and betel leaves to the deity. Some people out of *nērttik-kaḍaṇ* (vow made to the deity) sacrifice goats and cocks at the place of alter provided outside the shrine. Generally, people belonging to *Harijaṇ* and *Vaṇṇār* communities do the job of butchering the animals brought for sacrifice and take a little amount of

meat/money for doing the job. People then take the carcasses of animals to their respective houses and cook them. In the evening ritually they offer the feast to the visiting deity Mīṇākshiyammaṇ, later only to be served to the guests and consumed by themselves. Besides this non-vegetarian item, every house also prepares another delicious item known as *karuvāṭṭuk kuḷambu*, a kind of broth prepared with dry fishes and along with the *murugaikkāraip poriyal* (a fried dish prepared out of the green leaves of drumstick tree) as must items for the Goddess. Another special item known as *koḷuk-kaṭṭai* (an eatable item prepared out of rice powder and jaggery) is also offered to the goddess on her arrival.

In the morning, some prominent people reach the place of Mīṇākshiyammaṇ and decorate her. By afternoon, the temple trustees followed by others reach the place and bring her to the village accompanied by the rousing folk music. The *pūjāri* then prepares the *karagam* of the Goddess decorated with yellow coloured sari and blouse and flowers on her. By the evening the Goddess Mīṇākshiyammaṇ starts her *Jāttirai* to personally visit the village people. After crossing the distance of two kilometers surrounded by bushy thorns, she receives the bustling welcome of the people. The portable image of the Goddess that is symmetrically proportioned head, gorgeously made out of *pañca lōgam* (alloy of five metals, viz. gold, iron, copper, lead and silver) that enters the village is nearly two feet in height, well ornamented and attractively decorated with colourful flowers. She is red-coloured and fierce, having the garland of lemons and holding a trident and sword in her right and left hands respectively. Her white corneas and black irises are eye-catching. They greet her with the *ārattis* (a lighted camphor in a plate waved before the image of god) and garlands. Throughout the streets every family welcomes her with lot of *bhaya-bhakti*.

During the whole week of *Jāttirai* period, members of the household observe certain restrictions, refraining from sex, not pounding spices, eating calming foods and not going out of the

village. It is forbidden for people leaving the *Ūr*, their own ancestral place, staying for a night even outside and the same to the outsiders coming and staying in the village on or after the *Jāttirai cār̥ru*. It usually coincides at least with some amount of raindrops on that particular day. When she enters the periphery of the village around 8 p.m., her sister Piḍāriyamman along with the people provide her rousing welcome to her original residence. Meanwhile, every one throngs to see and receive her blessings. People wash the feet of the Goddess, and touch them for her blessing and also wave the holy fire of camphor flames and garland her. Some people decorate her with turmeric and vermilion and offer bananas and coconuts. The little children especially the new born babies are placed on the feet for the Goddess's blessing. Worshipped and respected, she is seen as a loved member of the community, not as someone to fear. In shifting from the shrine of western region to the street of eastern region *i.e.* her previous abode, "she goes directly into intimate, domestic space, with its connotations of fertility and growth" (Handelman 1995: 291).

As she moves into the midst of human beings, she becomes very intimate with them. Then the visiting Goddess occupies the 'middle-of-the street' as her *Sthala* (Abode) and thereafter symbolically she stays there forever. This is the street, where the *Redḍiyār* community lives in absolute majority and outnumbers other castes and communities even today. After a while, the Goddess leaves the place symbolically through this street and approaches her once lived original home. However, she purposely slows down her steps when she is nearing her place. As her original interest was only to seeing and soothing her people (who suffered in the heavy rain before sometime), she determines not to visit her house at any cost and stay there for a moment even. When she nears her erstwhile house, she just refuses to step in. But the people put all their efforts to take her into the shrine however unsuccessfully. A man from

Reḍḍiyār community who assumes the role of the Goddess is just reluctant and faints in front of the shrine despite the sincere attempt made by a number of worshippers to take him inside the premises of the shrine. It is believed that the Goddess quietly leaves the place and straight away proceeds in the western direction to her present abode set out near the village Pandikkuppam. She takes the same old route adjoining the Nandi River and reaches her place. People then enter the shrine and get the *prasādams* of the Goddess, *i.e.* *kungumam* and *mañcal*. Afterwards, the people proceed to the abode of Goddess Pōlērammā who has been erected in front of the *Ellaikkkal* (Symbolically representing the visiting Goddess who took her *sthala* at the middle-of-the street). Pōlērammā is a plague Goddess associated with smallpox commonly worshipped in Andhra Pradesh. The people living in the border regions of Andhra Pradesh propitiate her for curing various diseases like chickenpox, measles etc, and other problems. But for the same reason the people of Tamil Nadu worship the Goddess Māriyamman¹¹.

The Tiruttani people, like in other places of Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh, worship the goddess by the offerings of *kolukkattai* and *māviḷakku* (A lamp with a wick lighted in the hollow of rice dough). Some people proceed with *tīccattis* (Fire pots) carrying in their bare hands and their body covered with *vēppilai āḍais* (Dress made out of neem leaves) as to pay their *nērtikkadaṇ*. After the ritual, the people return home and offer the specially cooked food items of vegetarian and non-vegetarian as *paḍaiyal* (Offering) for the goddess. Then they eat the sumptuous dishes with friends and guests.

In the night, by 10 p.m., the *Terukkūttu*, the folk theatre troupe stages a play highlighting the importance of women folk in front of the Goddess Pōlērammā. To treat the Goddess royally, (as she is not supposed to sleep the night that day) the *terukkūttu* troupe performs a play throughout the night. People join the Goddess in

watching the play as part of the rituals, even though they feel sleepy. As she is overjoyed, next day morning she is escorted up to the boundary of the village and left to go to her place. The play used to be enacted till the early morning. Thereafter, a cock, a goat and a pig are sacrificed respectively in front of the images of the Goddesses Purāriyamman (Taṇigai Mīṇakṣiyamman) and Pōlērammā. Their blood is collected in a pot and mixed with some amount of rice. Their heads are buried in a pit dug on the middle of the street in front of the *Ellaikkal*¹² (the boundary stone) which is the symbolic representation of the Goddess Mīṇākshiyamman. The carcasses are shared by *tōṭṭi* and *vaṇṇāṇ*.

A *tōṭṭi* assumes the role of the goddess Pōlērammā and the people drive away the dangerous Goddess with the shrilling sounds of ululation from the place towards east beyond the shrine of Piḍāriyamman. The women from each house pour water on him who carries some branches of tamarind tree on the head. After reaching the East boundary, the Goddess however refuses to move further. But people forcibly drive the Goddess out of the village further towards east. In their attempt to drive her away from the village, they even use the filthy language like “*Aḍi tēvaḍiyā Pōlērammā*” (“You bitch Pōlērammā”), “*Pōlērammā oṇṇaip pōṭṭu ōkka*” (“Fucking you Pōlērammā”), “*Ūṅ kūḍiyilai enga pūlai vaikka*” (“To penetrate our penis into your cunt”). Many people joining in a chorus use such abusive language while chasing her from the village boundary: “*Ūṅ kūḍiyō moṛam pōla perucu. Enga pulō eṛumbu pōla ciṛucu. Ōkka muḍiyāma tavikkum*” (lit. “Your cunt is as big as a winnowing basket, and the penis that does not fuck it is as small as an ant”). The abuse is intended to call her, entice her, out of the village so that she, the dangerous Goddess, will move away from the village and may freely enter the other nearby village. They finally leave her at the periphery of the village. Following the Goddess, the *tōṭṭi*, carries the blood-rice

round the site of the village, sprinkling it on the ground as he goes. Many people go with him, but there is no music or tom-toms. The people shout out as they go “*poli! poli!*” (“Food! Food!”) and clap their hands and wave their sticks above their heads to keep off the evil spirits. Subsequently, the *tōṭṭi* sprinkles the blood-rice all over the cultivable lands covering all the directions of the village. When the *tōṭṭi* carries out the final ritual of *Jāttirai*, nobody is expected to cross or confront him or otherwise he/she will face wrath of the ferocious Goddess Pōlērammā.¹³ The sole object of the worship of this deity is to propitiate her and to avert her wrath. Besides for the fertility and prosperous life, it is also aimed at to get rid of cholera, small-pox, cattle disease, or drought, or to avert some of the minor evils of life.

So naturally, during the *Jāttirai* day, the people belonging to *Reḍḍiyār* community living away from their ancestors *Ūr*, are expected to visit their ancestral place and get the blessings of the Goddess without fail. The implicit meaning is that when the mother is visiting their place, they should congregate wholly there and greet her whole-heartedly for her blessings. For any reason she should not become upset and dejected over their casual attitude or subsequent absence.

Enticing her to come out of her present centre to the original home and thus inducing her to occupy ‘the middle *sthala*’ is at one level symbolically means of her sojourn from cosmic encompassment to the earthly plane (Handelman 1995: 292). She is perceived as the Goddess remaining among the people as well as disappearing from them on some pretext.

The Implicit Agenda

The implicit agenda of the *Jāttirai* is to keep the home and surrounding in hygienic condition and away from any sort of pollutions. In olden days, because of unhygienic sense, people suffered

severely and often got affected by the dangerous diseases like cholera, plague, measles, chickenpox, etc. It is in the sense of making the people to lead the life with the hygienic conscience that the *Jāttirai* is performed. Other wise, it is believed that the mother goddess will leave them to suffer in distress. This is what is meant by the episode of Purāriyamman. The elder sister becomes annoyed when her sister's children make her own place rotting and thus create the situation for her to leave the place in great despair and distress. She cannot tolerate any nonsense and callous attitude of the people in keeping their dwelling place neat and clean.

The relationship between the Mīṇākshiyamman (presently representing the western periphery), the Pōlērammā (representing the northern periphery) and the Piḍāriyamman (representing the eastern periphery) is quite interesting. The seven girl children of Piḍāri seem to be acting as the protecting deities of the other seven boundaries along with these three Goddesses. It is as to bring them in the middle of the *Ūr* at least once in a year for the welfare of the people, the *Jāttirai* seems to be celebrated at the middle of the street in the month of *Āḍi*. There upon they are pleased by the *nērtikkadaṇs* of the people in that night and followed by the appeasement by the sacrifices of animals in the morning. In nutshell, it can be said that the *Jāttirai* is nothing but the confluence of all goddesses representing the ten directions. So it is the movement *i.e.* the *Jāttirai* of the border goddesses from their respective regions to the inner space coming for refreshment only and once again to go back to their own exterior regions. So do the people who assemble at the ancestral *Ūr* once in a year from their respective places.

The Goddess Revealed

During the night of *Jāttirai* day *i.e.* on Tuesday, the soon-to-be-revealed Goddess, the Pōlērammā, her head covered, slips from the

washerman's home into the night accompanied by a group of drummers and washermen (The Pōlērammā – the Cholera Goddess is popularly believed to be the mother of the washerman. He is therefore chosen to officiate as the *pūjāri*, as the son alone can hope to succeed in propitiating such a fierce divinity). The washerman carries the visiting northern boundary Goddess Pōlērammā on his head to the middle-of-the street in center of the village. Having the oval shape of huge wide eyes, the Goddess wears a sari of yellow and red colours. Her entire head is wreathed with jasmine. Her garland is again half neem, half jasmine. Around the waist outside her sari is a folded cloth pouch filled with neem leaves. She thus reaches 'the middle-of-the street' from the washer-man's house and takes seat in front of the *Ellaikkal* (the boundary stone), which is nothing but the symbolic representation of the Mīṇākshiyamman alias Purāriyamman. There the latter's sister Piḍāriyamman also comes into contact with these Goddesses. Here is a profound moment of union in which these Goddesses of two peripheries fuse together within the middle of the Goddess of the interior. They mingle within the Purāriyamman so does she within them. "This is the ultimate self-union of the Goddess, of her coming into full self-awareness within the ritual cosmos of the Jatra" (Handelman 1995: 304). In the form of the Big Goddess, Mīṇākshiyamman emerging from within her shrine to 'middle' space points out her moving directional axis of west to east, from a 'higher' positioning (west) to a 'lower' one (east) (Beck 1976: 215-16)¹⁴. Her movement towards her worshippers and her embodiment there is a descent from her shrine in an auspicious direction (east). Mīṇākshiyamman departs swiftly to her abode situated on the western region again every year. 'This 'again' points out her continuous staying in a westerly direction, the direction of rain' (Beck, *Ibid.*, p. 215), spiraling inwards within the domestic space. In the middle of the street, she rests from her labours for some hours at a pavilion that

faces west and disappears from there into the dark night. It is expected that rain should fall on that day or later within few days, to demonstrate her divineness and status of a mother caring towards the people for their progress and overall development. A few weeks later, the vital monsoon season starts in earnest, which is the proof that Purāriyamman indeed was fully present in Tiruttani.

Pōlērammā, the Goddess revealed, is the first of the sequence to enter within the domestic space of homes (including that of the washermen), in order to be worshipped there. But she is not worshipped in homes as she has furious look and extended tongue. Hence, she stays overnight within the middle of their dwellings, her presence there is feared. Unlike the visiting Goddess *i.e.* 'the middle-of-the street goddess', Taṇigai Mīṇākshiyamman, the place of Pōlērammā representing the northern periphery in *Jāttirai* suggests that she is the original Goddess of *Reḍḍiyār* community who migrated originally from the North India and later from the Telugu country. But, the presence of the Pōlērammā is difficult for people to bear because of her demonic personality. The living presence of the holistic Goddess in Tiruttani on the day of *Jāttirai* invariably finds her direct relationships with her children, accepting their devotion and reciprocating with beneficence. To their worshippers the Goddess distributes the life-giving redness of vermilion and pesticide of turmeric. By that she assures the good health to her people.

During the seven days of *Jāttirai*, women perform rituals for the Purāriyamman in their homes. Parents perform rituals in the shrine to protect their children against diseases like cholera, chickenpox, etc. In some of the houses, Taṇigai Mīṇākshiyamman (Purāriyamman) is consecrated by women in the home as a mound of clay with a flower on top, surrounded by neem leaves, placed on a new sari and they feed a particular food item called *kūl* (Ragi gruel) and distribute it freely to the kith and kin and also to the passers-by.

On the *Jāttirai* day, children are taken to the shrine of Piḍāriyammaṇ to break ‘thousand-eye’ pots. The reference to ‘eyes’ in the name of the pot may refer to the sores of the pox disease. Pōlērammā – the Goddess of Telugu country is the counterpart of Māriyammaṇ of Tamil Nadu and equates her in all respects. During the night of *Jāttirai* day, several people circumambulate the make-shift shrine of Pōlērammā (who temporarily is stationing in the middle of the street) clockwise, holding ‘the thousand eye pots’ on their heads. In front of the goddess, facing the auspicious, life-giving east, the pot is hurled to the ground and smashed. Thus, “symbolically the head is offered to the Goddess in the hope that she will reciprocate with a whole, renewed head” (Handelman, *Op.cit.*, p. 313). This is in order to fulfill vows of thanksgiving for having survived the epidemic diseases like chickenpox, measles, etc.

Especially on the Tuesday of the *Jāttirai* festival, a number of families go to the shrine of Piḍāriyammaṇ and sacrifice the blood of cocks, goats to the goddess in the shrine’s courtyard¹⁵. The earth is smothered by the shattering of animal’s blood. (Besides the *Jāttirai* day, animal sacrifices are also offered, especially when the village is threatened with an epidemic or with serious famine). People in the evening wait eagerly for the arrival of the Goddess Purāriyammaṇ (Mīṇākshiyammaṇ) in the middle of the street. Everyone on the street, householders and passerby alike insist on receiving her blessings. Their mood is joyful and demanding.

Purāriyammaṇ Meets Pōlērammā and Piḍāriyammaṇ

By Tuesday evening a platform covered by a canopy is erected in front of the *Ellaikkal* – ‘the Goddess of the middle of the street’ viz. the Purāriyammaṇ (Mīṇākshiyammaṇ) at the main street called *Periya Teru* (Big Street). Before the midnight, the Pōlērammā

reaches as the finished Big Goddess (later to be revealed) from the house of washerman to the spot where she faces towards the east direction. Strikingly Pōlērammā, Purāriyamman and Piḍāriyamman are all wearing the *tālis* the wedding badges, but no reference is available to their spouses. Perhaps this suggests that originally the male does not matter in their scheme of things. It indeed refers to the superiority of womenfolk in the Dravidian matrilineal social system.

The following observation of Handelman (*Ibid.*, p. 319) on **Gangammā Jātra** of Tirupati can be here extended also to the *Purāriyamman Jāttirai* of Tiruttani: “The Goddess stretches herself cosmically: simultaneously she fragments and devolves her self (the Big Goddess) and transcends and evolves her self. The process is highly transactional, in keeping with the ontic maxim of Hinduism that, to give is to get. In her self-fragmentation, she gives herself in small bits to the multitude of her devotees, entering into them, their homes, their soil, just as they have given themselves to her in myriad ways during the past days. At the same moment she disappears and ascends. Momentarily, as she stretches herself, her force is diffused, and perhaps her devotees experience her separation from the human plane as the opening of space suddenly revealed within the confining connectivities of cosmos, as spaciousness for new beginnings”.

Cosmos, Gender, Caste

Jāttirai, the peculiar village festival found much in the border area of Andhra Pradesh, demonstrates some interesting aspects of the gender, cosmos and caste of the people and their participation. Like the *Jātras* of Andhra Pradesh, the *Purāriyamman Jāttirai* (though not much popular like the *Gangammā Jātra* of Tirupati) reveals its own people’s caste and gender formation and their identity. All

Jāstras/Jāttirais are the festivals of demonstrating the superiority of womenfolk in domestic as well as cosmic sphere.

Jāttirais portray the greatness of the Mother Goddesses unequivocally in the male dominated society. Though it is true that the male participation is much needed to conduct the *Jāttirai* yet their role is limited with only management aspects but not in its whole exercise. The participation of women devotees is a must and more vital in *Jāttirais*. Males have a significant role in the ritual part only.

In their temples, the models of their cosmos, South Indian deities of black stone live deep in the interior, in the dimly lit cave-like centre, the middle that is simultaneously the height of the axis mundi. Regardless of temple size and wealth, or the popularity of the deity, each Goddess and God in principle encompasses the cosmos. "Each is therefore the cosmic whole, existing simultaneously in the middle (the whole) and high up (the whole), and further out and lower down (as parts of that cosmic whole, and therefore as parts of itself). Moreover, the relationship between the whole and part is in continuous movement and flux (*e.g.* Handelman 1987)¹⁶, the deity moving out and down, in and up. This too is the movement of the deity in relation to the worshipper, moving down and out to come closer, in and up to go further away" (*Ibid.*, p. 322).

Each and everything is connected to make this kind of integrated cosmos systematically. The deity's self-realization as the cosmic encompassment occurs, as it moves further in and higher up. The deity's simultaneous existence all the time everywhere is suggested through the holistic encompassment at the highest plane of cosmos. As everything is connected, the deity is aware of everything. The cosmos is only cosmic self of the deity. It is through the extreme density of its connections that this level of encompassment of total knowledge is formed. On separation and gaps in the fabric of connectivity, each of the time, place and space is premised.

Therefore, “the further in and higher up the deity moves, the denser the connectivity of the cosmos, and the more dense the deity becomes” (*Ibid.*).

The density of the cosmos equates the stone’s seamless impermeability, solidity and thickness. The indication of the great interiority and distance from human beings is the deity’s turning into a rock on the human plane. If all movement is simultaneous and not sequential, it is an index of the movement of 1. Simultaneity which is total knowledge. 2. On the human plane which may appear like a ‘frozen’ motion. 3. The interior one of the rock that has to move everywhere. ‘This density of holistic encompassment is the epistemic index of cosmic hierarchy’ (*Ibid.*, p. 323). The deity’s movement, which is descending and devolving, opens tears and separations in the connectivity of self, cosmos and knowledge. The density of the cosmos and deity on the lower planes is lessened and godhead to time and space is also introduced. The importance of density and quality in human relationships of everyday is echoed by this emphasis on the significance of thickness and multiplicity in the constitution of cosmos.

The aforesaid observation of Handelman on the movement of Gangamma towards the people of Tirupati is applicable to the movement of Purāriyamman of Tiruttani towards her people as well. Handelman opines that the shaping of the deity’s self is integral to self-identity and to the empowerment of self. It is by coming out and down to the devotees that the deity acquires self-awareness. The deity is the cosmic encompassment as well as a part of itself, a fragment. Synchronizing with its worshippers, this part of the active deity is lower and less dense form of it and shares the experiences of time and space with them. The separation between the cosmic encompassment and its part, the opening of gaps in the density of the cosmos on its lower planes, is the reason why time and space exists. “The problem for the worshipper on the human plane is how to

induce or seduce the deity into her embodied self and therefore into otherness, thereby paradoxically parting with herself as she moves into conscious selfhood and empowering self-awareness" (*Ibid.*, p. 324).

These formulations speak of the emergence of the self and the shaping of identity in the disguise and revelation of Purāriyamman. Each form emerges from deep within the middle (of the Goddess, the home) but is externalized at the border (of the Goddess) and (with changes in form) moves progressively deeper within the living space and being of others, her worshippers. Before the *Jātra* begins the Goddess is elevated deep within herself, far away in the stony density of cosmic encompassment. In this condition she has little awareness of herself and others, and so no perspective towards herself. In other words, as the cosmic encompassment she neither knows nor has any need to know who she is. "To acquire self-knowledge she needs an external perspective that will tell her who she is and how she is different from others" (*Ibid.*, pp. 324–25). As she moves through the streets she experiences the separations of space and place. Her worshippers are persuading her to fragment, to externalize, to come to her own surface of self, to shatter exterior forms that are superficial and transitory, to recognize how very attractive to them she is, and so should they be to her. Emerging from deep within herself, surfacing through the exterior of the guise, she leaves exterior public space to enter deep within domestic intimacy where her true form is worshipped. In a sense she holds everything together in its interiority, just as the mother holds everything together at the hearth.

Gender in Indian social life is often hierarchical, divisive and rigid. The metaphysics of gender identity open cultural imaginings that are shut down in the gender of social roles (*Ibid.*, p. 330). The *Purāriyamman Jāttirai* explores contradictions of this sort, and shows the unified flow of gender. The premises of gender at the

outset of the *Jāttirai* are the following: The source of benefice is female. The dominant male forces become subordinates during the *Jāttirai* activities. The female (Purāriyamman) emerges into herself through the male (the *Reḍḍiyār* community member) assumed as a female. In layers, the qualities of both the male and female are shown to be more superficial than the deeper character of the female, the Goddess who encompasses maleness. The emergence of the female from within herself moves her through a boundary that is both male and female. The static (stone) form transforms into human form and in course of its action it destroys the maleness and moves into the domestic sphere as a female member that too as a caring mother. In a way it suggests that male and female qualities are within every human being. It is only mother who protects the children from all enemies and diseases. During the *Jāttirai* day the male who appears in public as the Purāriyamman perhaps experiences the female within his being. The *Purāriyamman Jāttirai* makes and shapes femaleness to tap its powers, keeping the male out of this cosmic construction. “The engenderment of this cosmic self is an especially powerful mode of being and ideological integration for the peoples of castes termed left-hand” (*Ibid.*, p. 332).

The division of castes as right-hand and left-hand has been integral to Tamil society. Most of the village goddesses of Tamil Nadu have their base and domain with the right-hand agriculturist and land-owning communities. Quoting the following words of Handelman (*Ibid.*) may substantiate the above said statement further clear. “Narayana Rao argues that in the epics of these castes the men ‘aspire to heroic warrior status and keep their women under strict control (Narayana Rao 1986: 147)¹⁷. So too in narratives of these castes, women turn their men into heroes, sending them to defend the borders, while they themselves fade into domestic obscurity. However these also are the social groups who often worship unattached, disease-bringing goddesses of the peripheries

whose ethos is distinct from goddesses of the centre. Thus the right-hand configuration of goddess worship contrasts clearly between the meekness and placidity of the woman under her warrior husband's control and the violence of the peripheral woman. The epics of left-hand, trading and artisan castes are woman-centred: the female heroically defends the integrity of the social group against an alien, aggressive power (Narayana Rao 1989: 114)¹⁸. Among these castes, contends Narayana Rao, 'women represent an inner strength and men remain largely passive' (Narayana Rao 1986: 147)."

In Tiruttani, the castes that have dominant role is right-hand communities such as *Redḍiyār* community (the migrated one from Telugu country) and *Agamuḍaiyār* community. But the other castes such as *tōṭṭi*, *vaṇṇāṇ* and *kuyavaṇ* (Potter) that have formal role to play in the *Jāttirai* are left-hand communities. In this respect it is different from the *Gangammā Jātra* of Tirupati. "In Tirupati, all the castes that have some formal role in the *Gangammā Jātra* are of the left-hand. Moreover all the disguises of the concealed Goddess are either of left-hand castes or of tribal peoples with a leftish ethos (e.g. mobility in space)", (Handelman, *Op.cit.*, p. 332).

Purāriyamman worship posits the same Goddess at the centre and periphery, with both sharing number of attributes. In the centre is the domestic (but not domesticated) middle-of-the-street goddess whose presence in the midst of the community is desired, who has taught the lesson of leading the hygienic way of life, as a source of benefice. At the periphery is the Goddess Piḍāriyamman who has children, and who is more domestic in nature. Protecting the people like her sister against the diseases (Purāriyamman who continues to live in western periphery and visits only on *Jāttirai* day), Piḍāriyamman's marital status is again not so important. Both are guardian figures. Both collaborate in defending the *Ūr* against the incursions of the threatening epidemic diseases like cholera, chick-

enpox etc. Moreover these Goddesses unequivocally unite into one, rather than substituting for, or alternating with, one another. “The united Goddess is then the source of benefice, of fertility and protection. In rituals of left-hand castes, as in their epics, the position of women jointly as agents of domestic well-being and territorial guardianship seems distinct from that of women in right-hand castes. Nonetheless the role of goddess rites and their cosmologies in the integration of left-hand castes has hardly been broached” (*Ibid.*, p. 333).

The people of Tiruttani believe that they are protected by the Goddesses such as Pōlērammā, Purāriyamman and Piḍāriyamman respectively representing North, West and Eastern periphery regions respectively. Remaining seven directions are protected by the *Ēlu Kaṇṇigaigaḷ* (the Seven Virgins) of Purāriyamman. The seven goddesses are supposed to be kind and indulgent, while Pōlērammā is vindictive and inexorable and difficult to propitiate. The integrity of the Tiruttani Ūr is woven into the role of the female as protectress both of the domestic domain and of the entire social unit. “Epistemologically this agency of the female may depend on male recognition in ritual of the fluidity of gender that enables men not simply to impersonate female protectress, but to become them. The idea of gender as a continuum may have especial resonance with left-hand caste integration” (*Ibid.*). The role of *tōṭṭi* and *vaṇṇāṇ* in Jāttirai also suggests the agenda of leading the hygienic life. As *vaṇṇāṇ* engages himself in cleaning the dirty clothes so as the *tōṭṭi* does the sweeping job of the village by removing the dead bodies and carcasses of animals. The *vaṇṇāṇ* has the most intense relationship with the Pōlērammā. According to the myth, it is the body of the *vaṇṇār* woman and the head of the Brahmin woman joined together in the case of the goddess called *Māriyamman* in Tamil Nadu and as *Pōlērammā* in Telugu country. The *vaṇṇārs* and *tōṭṭis*, the two untouchable communities, reeling at the bottom of

the caste hierarchy, do get more prominent role and due respect in the *Jāttirai* days. So do as the womenfolk socially marginalized by their counterparts. It is these three segments of society which play the greater role and contribute significantly to the rituals of *Jāttirai* and make it a successful event.

Considering the above discussion of various factors, involved in the *Jāttirai* of Purāriyamman, we might conclude that the village festival is not merely an outcome of religious sentiments of folk people, but also a socio-cultural product in which a lot of subjects got woven into its fabrics. At one level, it serves as a tool of ethnic identity of *Redḍiyār* community who migrated from Andhra Pradesh some few hundred years ago. At another level, it presents the caste based social hierarchical system of India in general and of Tamil Nadu in particular, in which every one is assigned some role or other for maintaining community integrity and social harmony. Above all, it reminds us the Dravidian matrilineal socio-cultural tradition where women matter more important than their counterparts.

Notes

- * This paper is written on the inspiration of the brilliant article entitled “**The Guises of the Goddess**” by Don Handelman published in *Syllables of Sky*, David Shulman (Ed.), Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1995. I owe much to the author for using his methodology and concepts in this paper.
- ** Henry Whitehead, *The Village Gods of South India*, Asian Educational Services, New Delhi, 1988 (II ed., Revised & Enlarged), p.11.
- 1. **Tiruttani**: There are many temples for Lord Murugaṇ in Tamil Nadu, out of which six important temples are termed as ‘*Ārupaḍai Viḍu*’ i.e., Six Abodes of Lord Murugaṇ in its series, Tiruttani is the Fifth *paḍai viḍu* (5th

Abode) of Lord Murugaṇ. Murugaṇ developed wrath to kill demons and their leader Sūrapadmaṇ. He fought a battle with Sūrapadmaṇ at Tiruccendūr and killed him and his associates. Later, on the occasion of His marriage with Valli, He fought a little war with tribal king of Valli malai, who is the father of Valli. Thereafter He chose Tiruttani Hill to subside His anger and He made it as his abode. There He got His anger reduced and hence the hill, where His, anger subsided, is called as ‘Tanigai Malai’ (The hill where His anger was subsided).

Legend has it that Murugaṇ/Subramaṇiya swāmy married Valli who hailed from the Valli Malai nearby. Legend also has it that Indra - the king of the Gods offered his daughter Deyvayāṇai in marriage to Murugaṇ, and along with her presented his elephant *airāvatam* as part of his dowry offering. Upon *airāvatam*’s departure Indra found his wealth waning.

2. **Redḍis:** The ‘Kāpus’ or ‘Redḍis’ are the largest caste in the Madras Presidency, numbering more than two millions, and are the great caste of cultivators, farmers, and squireens in the Telugu country. (For more details see: Edgar Thurston & K. Rangachari, *Castes and Tribes of Southern India*, Vol. III–K, Asian Educational Services, New Delhi, Rpt.1987 (First Published: 1909) p. 222). The *Kāpus* are said to have originally dwelt in Ayodhya (*Ibid.*, p. 232). *Redḍi* is the usual title of the *Kāpus*. (*Ibid.*, p. 230).

In the Gazetteer of Anantapūr they are described as being the great land-holding body in the Telugu districts, who are held in much respect as substantial, steady-going yeomen, and next to the Brahmans are the leaders of Hindu Society. In the Salem Manual it is stated that “the *Redḍis* are provident. They spent their money on the land, but are not parsimonious. They are always well dressed, if they can afford it. The gold ornaments worn by the women or the men are of the finest kind of gold. Their houses are always neat and well built, and the *Redḍis* give the idea of good substantial ryots. They live chiefly on ragi (grain: *Eleusine Coracana*), and are a fine, powerful race” (*Ibid.*, pp. 222-23).

The term *Kāpu*, Mr. H.A. Stuart writes, means a watchman, and *Redḍi* means a king. The *Kāpus* or *Redḍis* (Raṭṭi) appear to have been a powerful Dravidian tribe in the early centuries of the Christian era, for they have left traces of their presence at various places in almost

every part in India". (*Ibid.*, p. 223). By religion the *Kāpus* are both Vaiṣṇavites and Śaivites, and they worship a variety of deities, such as Thāllammā, Nāgarapammā, Puṭṭāllammā, Aṅkammā, Muneśwara, Pōlērammā, Dēsammā. To Muneśwara and Dēsammā Pongal (cooked rice) is offered, and buffaloes are sacrificed to Pōlērammā (*Ibid.*, p. 243). In the *Kāpu* community, women play an important part, except in matters connected with agriculture (*Ibid.*, p. 245).

3. **Piḍāri:** She is one of the consorts of Śiva and Goddess of benevolence. Piḍāri as a Goddess seated with "fire issuing from her whole body to indicate her great wrath. On her head she wears a crown, various ornaments in her locks, on her forehead the mark of Śiva, bulky jewels in the large holes of her ears and two flowers behind them. She has four hands holding in them, respectively, a kettle-drum with a snake, a trident, the skull of Brahma and a goad. Her throne is an altar. Piḍāri temples contain also an image of Vigneśvara and the entrance is guarded by two horrible door-keepers called Maṇṇaḍiyār. She has eighteen generals. Piḍāri is said to be the chastizer of all evil spirits because those who hang or poison themselves, or die any violent death are turned into malignant demons who would destroy the whole human race if not kept in check by Piḍāri (For more details see: H. Krishna Sastri, *South-Indian Images of Gods and Goddesses*, Bharathiya Publishing House, Delhi, 1974, p. 224).

The buffalo sacrifices, which these village deities are generally fond of, indicate their connection with Mahishāsūramardīṇi, the slayer of the buffalo-demon. Some of the ceremonies peculiar to the temples of the village goddesses, besides animal sacrifices, are (1) fire-walking, (2) swinging on the *sidi* with a hook passed through the skin during what is otherwise known as the *chakra-pūja*, (3) lashing oneself with a whip, (4) piercing a metallic wire right through the tongue or through the sides of the mouth, (5) slashing at the breast and forehead with swords until the blood spurts out, (6) thrusting a spear through the abdomen and (7) carrying on head the *karagam*, lamps of ghee, or earthen pots with blazing fire in them. Annual festivals called *Jātras* are generally held in honour of the village deities. But when infectious diseases among men and cattle prevail, special worship is arranged for, to appease the deities by sacrificing animals, offering heaps of cooked rice mixed with blood, or by

carrying the *karagam*. This last is celebrated by dressing the selected person who has taken a vow to perform the ceremony, in the yellow cloths of a woman, putting on him a pot or pots profusely decorated with flowers and *mārgosa* leaves and supposed to contain in them the spirit of the particular goddess for whose propitiation the ceremony is gone through (H. Krishna Sastri, *Ibid.*, p. 226).

4. ***Sapta Kaṇṇigais / Sapta Mātrikās (Seven Virgins / Seven Mothers)***: The Śiva Śakti deities with the group of goddesses known as *Saptamātrikas*, or the “Seven Mothers”. They are: Brāhmi, Maheswari, Kaumāri, Vaishṇavi, Varāhi, Mahendri and Chāmuṇḍa. (H. Krishna Sastri, *Ibid.*, p. 190). The *Sapta-mātrikas* thus described found figured together in a group on the same panel and are quite a common sight within South-Indian villages and Śiva temples. When installed within the enclosure of a temple, they are seen often without a shrine built over them, and may receive such attention as the other minor deities of that (sic. those) temples. In Villages and in Piḍāri temples built exclusively for goddesses, they are worshipped regularly (H. Krishna Sastri, *Ibid.*, p. 196).

Most of the Śaivite goddesses described above have been found to be of fearsome appearance, fond of flesh, blood and wine and intimately connected with goblins, spirits, demons and diseases. Generally they are situated outside the village in groves of trees much dreaded by the people and are considered to be the *grāma devatas*, the guardian deities of the village. Often there are no temples properly so called, and where there are structures, they are crude and simple enshrining within them rough uneven stones representing the *ammā* or “mother” sacred to that village. Sometimes there is only a spear or a trident fixed up straight in the ground in place

5. ***Ellaiyamman***: Ellaiyamman literally means the boundary/periphery Goddess. At every village in the Tamil Nadu invariably there exists a boundary Goddess to protect the people from evil diseases and forces. Ellammā is also called Māhurammā, Akkali Devi, Reṇuka Devi. Pārvati and Parameshwara marry her in her twelfth year to *Rishi* Jamadagni. Parasurāma was born to Jamadagni and Ellammā. Once Ellammā or Reṇuka was immersed in watching the passing *Gandharvas* and displays her temptation. Jamadagni orders Parasurama to cut down his mother. Knowing the plight of Reṇuka or Ellamma, a *māḍiga* woman

embraces and weeps. Parasurāma cuts both of them. Pleased by Parasurāma's obedience, Jamadagni grants a boon. Parasurāma asks for his mother's life.

Jamadagni bids his son to join the head to the trunk and sprinkle sacred water. In his hurry, Parasurāma joins the wrong trunk to his mother's head. Both the dead ladies come alive but one with a Brahmin trunk and *mādigā* head as Ellammā, the other with a Brahmin head and *mādigā* trunk as Mārammā.

6. Lannoy, Richard I., 1971, *The Speaking Tree. A Study of Indian Culture and Society*, New York: Oxford University Press (As quoted by Handelman 1995: 286).
7. Babb, Lawrence A., 1970, 'Marriage and Malevolence: The Uses of Sexual Opposition in a Hindu Pantheon', *Ethnology*, 9: 137–48 (As quoted by Handelman 1995: 286).
8. Fuller, C.J., 1980, 'The Divine Couple's Relationship in a South Indian Temple: Mīṇākshi and Sundarēśvara at Madurai', *History of Religions*. 19: 321–48 (As quoted by Handelman 1995: 287).
Ramanujan, A.K., 1986, 'Two Realms of Kannada Folklore', in *Another Harmony: New Essays on the Folklore of India*, S.H. Blackburn and A.K. Ramanujan (Eds.), Berkeley: University of California Press, pp. 41–75 (As quoted by Handelman 1995: 287).
Shulman, David D., 1980, *Tamil Temple Myths: Sacrifice and Divine Marriage in the South Indian Saiva Tradition*, Princeton: Princeton University Press (As quoted by Handelman 1995: 287).
9. Hanchett, Suzanne, 1988, *Coloured Rice: Symbolic Structure in Hindu Family festivals*, Delhi: Hindustan Publishing Corporation (As quoted by Handelman 1995: 288).
10. **Terukkūttu**: *Terukkūttu* is a folk theatre performance very much popular in Tiruvaḷḷūr, Kāñcīpuram and North Arcot districts of Tamil Nadu. During summer when people had no work on the fields the street dramas were used to be performed often in connection with the temple of the village. In North Arcot and Kāñcīpuram districts it was a religious custom to enact the story of *Mahābhārata* in front of the Draupati temples. *Terukkūttu* is considered as an art related to temples of Goddesses. The place where the ritual is carried out the stage is regarded as a sanctum sanctorum which has been transferred outside the temple. These performances are intended not just for a profane

audience, but mainly for the village deity (See for more details: Saraswathi Venugopal 1996: 134).

11. **Māriyamman**: One of the many stories about Māriyamma, the goddess of small-pox, is as follows: One of the nine great *Rishis* in the olden days, named Piruhu, had a wife named Nāgāvalī, equally famed for her beauty and her virtue. One day, when the *Rishi* was away from home, the Trimurthi (sic. *Trimūrtis*) came to visit her, to see whether she was as beautiful and virtuous as reported. Not knowing who they were, and resenting their intrusion, she had them changed into little children. They naturally took offence, and cursed her, so that her beauty faded away, and her face became dotted with marks like those of the small-pox. When Piruhu returned, and found her thus disfigured, he drove her away, and declared that she should be born a demon in the next world, and cause the spread of a disease, which would make people like herself. In memory of the change which Piruhu found in her, she was called Māri, *i.e.* changed, in the next birth. When she was put away, it is said that a washerwoman took care of her, and that in consequence she was also called Uppai (a washerman's oven) (As narrated by Henry Whitehead in his book entitled '*The Village Gods of South India*', p. 115).

Another story about the origin of Māriammā: Māriammā was the mother of Parasurāma, one of the incarnations of Vishṇu, and wife of Jamadagni, a famous *Rishi* (Vedic seer). She was so chaste in mind that she could carry water in a mass without any vessel, and her wet cloth would fly up into the air and remain there till it was dry. One day, as she was coming home from bathing, some of the *Gandharvas*, or heavenly singers, flew over her, and she saw their reflection in the ball of water in her hand. She could not help admiring their beauty; and, through this slight lapse from the perfect ideal of chastity, she lost her power, the water flowed down to the ground, and her cloth fell from the sky. So she arrived home with no water and with a wet cloth. The *Rishi* questioned her as to the meaning of this and she confessed her fault. Her stern husband ordered her son Parasurāma to take her into the wilderness and cut off her head. So the son took his mother away, but when they came to the appointed place Māriammā met a Pariah women (it is a washerwoman in some other story), and in her longing for sympathy

embraced her in her arms. So Parasurāma cut off both their heads together and went back in great sorrow. His father promised him any reward he chose to ask in return for his obedience: so Parasurāma asked that his mother might be restored to life. The father granted his request and gave him some water in a vessel and a cane, telling him to put his mother's head on her body, sprinkle the water on her, and tap her with the cane. In his eager haste he put his mother's head on the body of the Pariah woman and *vice versa*, and restored them both to life. The woman with the Brahman head and Pariah body was afterwards worshipped as Māriammā; while the woman with the Pariah head and Brahman body was worshipped as the goddess Yellammā. To Yellammā buffaloes are sacrificed; but to Māriammā goats and cocks, but not buffaloes (As narrated by Henry Whitehead in his book entitled '*The Village Gods of South India*', p. 116).

Māriyamman is the corresponding Goddess to Reṇuka Devi and Polērammā. Māriammā, for instance, under the name Mārikā occurs in the *puṇas* as the goddess presiding over small-pox and other infectious diseases. Polērammā, the village goddess commonly worshipped in the Telugu country, is also supposed to correspond to Sītāla (Sītāla or Sītāladevi is recognized as the goddess presiding over small-pox both in the Canarese and the Telugu districts).

12. ***Ellaikkal* (The boundary stone):** In many villages the shrine is simply a rough stone platform under a tree, with stones or iron spears stuck on it to represent the deity. Often a large rough stone with no carving on it is stuck up in a field or under a tree, and serves for shrine and image alike. The boundary stone of the village lands is very commonly regarded as a habitation of a local deity, and might be called a shrine or symbol with equal propriety.
13. **The reason for propitiating the village Goddesses:** Every village in South India is believed by the people to be surrounded by evil spirits, who are always on the watch to inflict diseases and misfortunes or all kinds on the unhappy villagers. They lurk every-where, on the tops of palmyra trees, in caves and rocks, in ravines and chasms. They fly about in the air, like birds of prey, ready to pounce down upon any unprotected victim, and the Indian villagers pass through life in constant dread of these invisible enemies. So the poor people turn for protection to the guardian deities of their village, whose function it is

to ward off these evil spirits and protect the village from epidemics of cholera, small-pox, or fever, from cattle disease, failure of crops, childlessness, fires, and all the manifold ills that flesh is heir to in an Indian village (Henry Whitehead, *Ibid.*, p. 46).

14. Beck, Lawrence A., 1970, 'Marriage and Malevolence: The Uses of Sexual Opposition in a Hindu Pantheon', *Ethnology*, 9: 137–48 (As quoted by Handelman 1995: 317).
15. **The myth behind the buffalo offering to the village Goddesses:** Buffalo sacrifice is still in practice at certain villages of Tiruttani town during *Jāttirai* days but such ritual is not prevalent in Tiruttani, the reason of which may not be easily traced.

In ancient days, the story runs, there lived a *karṇam*, i.e. a village accountant, in a village to the east. He was blind, and had only one daughter. A Pariah, well versed in the Vedas, came to the village in the disguise of a Brahmin. The elders of the village were deceived and induced the blind *karṇam* to give his daughter to him in marriage, that he might succeed to the office of *karṇam* in due time. The marriage was celebrated by Brahmin rites, and the *karṇam*'s daughter bore sons and daughters to her Pariah husband, without any suspicion arising in her mind as to his origin. After a time a native of the Pariah's own village came to the place where they were living, and recognised the Pariah disguised as a Brahmin. Seeing however that he was a man of influence he said nothing to the villagers, but went and told the Pariah's old mother. As he was her only son, the old woman set out in search of him, and came to the village where he lived, and sat down by the well used by the caste people. The Pariah happened to go there, and recognised his mother; so he took her to a barber, had her head shaved, passed her off as a Brahmin widow and brought her to his house, telling his wife that she was his mother and was dumb. He took the precaution strictly to enjoin her not to speak, lest her speech should betray them.

One day the wife ordered a meal with a dish made of wheat flour baked with sugar and made into long strings. During the meal, the mother, forgetting the injunction of silence, asked her son what the preparation was, saying it looked like the entrails of an animal! The wife overheard the remark, and her suspicions were aroused by the fact that her mother-in-law could speak, when her husband had said

that she was dumb, and did not know a common Brahmin dish like the one prepared by her; so she watched their conduct, and felt convinced that they belonged to a low caste, and were not Brahmins at all. Accordingly, she sent their children to school one day, when her husband was away from home, managed to get rid of the mother-in-law for a few hours, and then set fire to the house and burnt herself alive. By virtue of her great merit in thus expiating the sin she had involuntarily committed, she reappeared in the middle of the village in a divine form, declared that the villagers had done her great wrong by marrying her to a Pariah, and that she would ruin them all.

The villagers implored mercy in abject terror. She was appeased by their entreaties, consented to remain in the village as their village goddess, and commanded the villagers to worship her. When she was about to be burnt in the fire, she vowed that her husband should be brought before her and beheaded, that one of his legs should be cut off and put in his mouth, the fat of his stomach put on his head, and a lighted lamp placed on the top of it. The villagers seized the husband, stripped him naked, took him in procession round the village, beheaded him in her presence, and treated his leg and fat of his stomach as directed. Then her children came on the scene, violently abused the villagers and the village officers, and told them that they were the cause of their mother's death. The deity looked at her children with favour, and declared that they should always be her children, and that without them no worship should be offered to her.

The *Āsadīs* claim to be descendents of these children and during the festivals exercise the hereditary privilege of abusing the villagers and village officers in their songs. After being beheaded, the husband was born again as a buffalo, and for this reason a buffalo is offered in sacrifice to Ūramma, the village goddess (As narrated by Henry Whitehead in his book *The Village Gods of South India*, pp. 117–19).

16. Handelman, Don, 1987, 'Myths of Murugaṇ: Asymmetry and Hierarchy in a South Indian Purāṇic Cosmology', *History of Religions*, 27: 133–70 (As quoted by Handelman 1995: 322).
17. Narayana Rao, Velcheru, 1986, 'Epics and Ideologies: Six Telugu Folk Epics', in 'Another Harmony: New Essays on the Folklore of India', S.H. Blackburn and A.K. Ramanujan (Eds.), Berkeley: Uni-

versity of California Press, pp. 131–64 (As quoted by Handelman 1995: 332).

18. Narayana Rao, Velcheru, 1989, 'Tricking the Goddess: Cowherd Kāṭamarāju and the Goddess Ganga in the Telugu Folk Epic', in *Criminal Gods and Demon Devotees*. Alf Hitlebeitel (Ed.), Albany: State University of New York Press, pp. 105–21 (As quoted by Handelman 1995: 332).

Chapter – 2

A Study of Kāmaṇ Kadaippāḍal – The ballad on the Cupid reduced to ashes in the ‘Netrāgni’ of Śiva*

The love that the Greeks called *Eros* and the Romans *Amor* is certainly a love that involves intense bodily passions, persistent emotional drives, powerful, often disturbing, desires, and a mixture of sensual pleasures and pains that are usually inseparable from one another. Making love otherwise known as the sex is an emotion in motion. The very act of sex mostly results in producing offshoots of all creatures and thereby guarantees the existence of the world. No doubt, the Sex is divine. As such, the delightful feeling needs not to be condemned or curtailed; but ought to be approached aesthetically and handled properly under conscious control. Then there exist its beauty and bliss.

Sex is a very natural phenomenon and a ‘basic instinct’ to all creatures. But, only man has the capability to understand its nuances and fineness. Sex explicitly means ‘the union’ of beings of two opposite genders. Philosophically ‘Union’ is the ultimate goal of *ātma* to attain *mokṣa*. Hence, sex can be otherwise called *kāma* (Desire) – one of the four *puruṣārthas* of Indian Vedic philosophy, viz. *dharma* (Justice or Righteousness), *artha* (Wealth), *kāma* (Desire or Worldly enjoyments) and *mokṣa* (Liberation). If a person upholds righteousness while in the pursuit of wealth and worldly

enjoyments, then he/she automatically qualifies for the eternal blissful life, otherwise known as 'Liberation'. Obviously all creatures, especially human beings, strive hard to enjoy the life to the utmost happiness. In this regard, scriptures define the rights and duties of each individual for proper enjoyment called *dharma*. If anyone violates his/her *dharma*, then the person can be branded as *adhārmic*. In such a scheme of things, if a person inflicts pain on others, that person himself/herself will naturally suffer from that pain. For the purpose of enjoying the real quality of life with the development of inner peace and 'true happiness', the noble precept called *ahimsa* (Showing respect and love to all created beings) has been all along exalted by many seers since the beginning of the mankind. Man, in his religious pursuits, on the given socio-cultural backgrounds, often successfully finds suitable symbols for representing his perceptions over the aforesaid *puruṣārthas* though with subtle differences.

Against this backdrop, the present paper on the myth of Kāmaṇ (God of Love) would try to analyse various aspects of Kāma's life portrayed in *great tradition* and as well as in *little tradition*. It would discuss in detail about the '**Kāmaṇ Kadaippāḍal**' (Ballad on Kāmaṇ), 'The Ballad on Maṇmadana < Manmatha (Skt.)' chosen for the aforesaid study. In its attempt, it would study the structural aspects of *Kāmaṇ Kadaippāḍal (KK)* and also would try to identify the unique features of the ballad.

Portrayal of Kāmaṇ in Great Tradition

Kāmaṇ – the God of Love (from *kām*, 'wish', 'desire', 'longing for'), who kindles the feeling of sex in all creatures, is the son of Viṣṇu and Lakshmi (Tamil) < Lakshmī (Skt.). Etymologically, the word is derived from the word *kām* meaning desire, passion, lust, etc. Kāmaṇ is the Brāhmaṇical God of love. The legend goes that Kāmdev, holding the bow of sugarcane, having the string of a line

of humming bees and his arrow-shafts, which are topped with passion, pierces the heart. In Spring season, he moves through woodlands and hunts birds, beasts and men. Once in his foolish pride, he aimed his arrow at the mighty Lord Śiva who was in deep meditation. The God opened His forehead eye as He was disturbed and burnt him to ashes. Grief-stricken Rati, Kāmdēv's wife beseeched Lord Śiva to take pity on her and restore her husband to life. Śiva relented in the beginning, but later granted her the boon that she could see her husband but he would remain *anang* that meant without the physical form.

Kāmdēv, the God of Love, is found not only in the Brāhmanical pantheon but also in those of the Buddhists and Jainas. He may be compared with the Greek god *Eros* and the Latin deity *Cupid*. In the *Rig Veda* (V. 36, 1) it is likened to 'the desire of the thirsty steer for water', and in IX. 113, 11 the longing for happiness and the fulfillment of desires (Margaret and James Stutley 2003: 139). Kāma finds further mentions in *Rig Veda* (X, 129) wherein he has been depicted as the primal action arising in the One after it was instinct with life either through fervour or through abstraction. It is observed there how Desire first blossomed in it, that primal germ of the Mind and the wise sages, after deep thought and scrutiny, concluded that it was the link binding the Entity with the Non-Entity. In the *Rig Veda*, Kāma is hailed as unrivalled among the celestials, the deity of love, armed with an arrow which may pierce the heart. In the *Rig Veda*, Kāma, who is generally characterized as a good and of beneficial nature, is still considered more powerful, mightier than all the deities, and appealed to for succour and emancipation from all kinds of enemies (Saletore 1982: 660–61). In the *Atharva Veda* (XIX. 52, 1) Kāma denotes 'the primal germ of mind, which first arose within that One' (Margaret and James Stutley, *Ibid.*). In the aforesaid Veda, 'Kāma is bereft of the element of sex, he is elevated to the status of supreme god-head as

extremely great. He is first referred to as merely Desire, subsequently as the strength sustaining it. Often Kāma in this Veda is identified with Agni, the Fire-God, and though admitted to be of the same nature, when Kāma is distinguished from Agni, the former is acknowledged to be superior' (Saletore, *Ibid.*).

Kāma's origin is variously given. *Rig Veda* refers to him as the ever first born out of *ātma* and as the very handsome youth god (Maria Leach 1950: 569). As he is depicted as Self-Born (*ātma-bhū*), he is so called *aja* and also as the one not born of anyone or one not born at all and hence named *ananyaja*. *Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa* refers to *Dharma* (Justice) as his father and his mother as *Śraddha* (Faith). His wife, Rati or Reva, is the embodiment of wifely love; their daughter *Tr̥ṣṇa* (or *Tr̥ṣa*) represents 'thirst' as a form of desire (Margaret and James Stutley, *Ibid.*) and son Aniruddha represents 'unobstructed' as a category of enjoyment. In the later *Harivamśa*, he is the offspring of Lakshmī, the goddess of wealth, also the son of Viṣṇu and Lakshmī in their incarnations (*Avatāras*) of Kṛṣṇa and Rukmīṇī. He is also styled as the son of Brahmā and also as having risen from the waters and hence christened Ira-Rāja (Saletore, *Ibid.*, p. 661). But in the folk myth *Kāmaṇṇ Kadaippāḍal*, he has been described as the son of Viṣṇu and Lakshmi. However not out of their direct physical contact.

In Buddhism and Jainism, Kāma is scantily respected, whereas in Hindu religion, he is worshipped as the god of love. Buddha and Jaina religions consider birth as a result of sin. For this reason, they disregard Kāma. These religions preach that people should lead an austere life, for which everybody should denounce lust. They consider *Kāma*, the lust is the root of all the miseries. Therefore, in the quest of showing the *Kāmaṇṇ* and Rati in poor light, the Buddhism and Jainism depicted him and his wife according to their philosophical convenience. In the Buddhist pantheon, as one of the emanations of the Dhyāni Buddha Amitābha, the *Sādhanamāla*

depicts one of the five *sādhana*s a feminine deity called Tārodbhava Kurukulla. She is represented as seated in the Vajraparyāṅka attitude and beneath her seat are seen Kāma deva and his wife Rati, riding on the fiend Rāhu (Saletore, *Ibid.*, p. 663). In the similar line, the Jainas also tried to defame Kāmaṇṇ as and when situation demands. Among the attendants of Kubera or Vaiśravaṇa, the king of the Jaina Yakṣas, Kāma is one. The name Kāma was also applied to the Jaina Yakṣiṇī Kusumamālīni, with the *makara* symbol (*Ibid.*).

Kāmaṇṇ is known by several names which explain either his origin or his activities or some phase in his life. He is widely called *Madana*, ‘one who intoxicates another with passion’; *Manmatha*, ‘the mind-agitator’; *Smara*, ‘sprung from the mind or heart’; *Kārṣṇī*, ‘the son of Kṛṣṇa’; *Darpaka* or *Dīpaka*, ‘the one who blossoms’; *Pradyumna*, ‘the invincible conqueror’; *Kusumeṣu*, ‘one whose arrows are adorned with flowers’; *Kāmana*, ‘one who desires’; *Kālakeli*, ‘the gay or happy’; *Māyī*, ‘the deluder’; *Madhu-Dīpa*, ‘the lamp of honey or Spring’; *Muhira*, ‘the one who bewilders’; *Murmura*, ‘the flame which crackles’; *Rāhavṛnta*, ‘the stalk of passion’; *Rūpāstra*, ‘the weapon of beauty’; *Sāmantaka*, ‘the destroyer of peace’; *Samsāra Guru*, ‘the world-teacher’; *Vāma*, ‘the beautiful’; *Ratha-Mārīca*, ‘the voluptuary’. Besides these names, he has also been referred to as *Kāma dēvaṇ*, *Manmathaṇ*, *Manasijaṇ*, *Manobavaṇ*, *Manojaṇ*, *Siddhajaṇ*, *Māraṇ*, etc. All these words more or less mean that he is born out of mind i.e. *Manas*. It may be recalled here that *Maṇṇmadaṇ* is the son of Viṣṇu. But very strangely, he was not born to Lakṣmī out of Viṣṇu’s love, but from Viṣṇu’s mind directly – the moment Viṣṇu thought of him.

Regarding the demise of Kāmaṇṇ, a few interpretations are available in literature. The most famous of the myths of Kāma is the one in which Brahma, the creator, is himself held in the spell of love at sight of Dawn, the beautiful woman, produced also out of

his own meditation and is ridiculed by Śiva. Śiva's laughter at Brahma's plight, *i.e.* filled with desire for his own daughter, shocked the creator out of his passion and he "let the image of the woman go". Although freed of his passion, he was angered at the ridicule and cursed Kāma, saying on the day Kāma should let loose his shaft at Śiva, he would be reduced to ashes by one glance from Śiva's middle eye (Maria Leach, *Op.cit.*, p. 569). Similar interpretation (slightly variant) is: Brahma, who created Saraswati from his own meditation, went in disguise as a male deer to have sexual union with her, who was in disguise as a female deer. On the request of *dēvas* for some reasons, Śiva killed the male deer (Brahma). From the dead body of the male deer a delightful light emerged and reached the sky as *ādirai* Star. On the request of Saraswati, Śiva gave life to Brahma. Brahma became alive, however, he cursed Kāma to go to ashes by Śiva's eye, since the latter was responsible for that event (Mudaliyar 1986: 1134).

Consider the following another version on Kāma's destruction: "The demon Tāraka distressed all the gods so much that they all desired to slay him but they realized that such feat could only be achieved by a son of Śiva, who at that time in the deepest grief over the demise of his wife Sati, had become insensate to all emotions. The gods tried their best to coax Kāma to inspire Śiva with love and after great persuasion, Kāma took the great risk of shooting one of his arrows at the insensate and implacable Śiva who, on being thus disturbed in His deep meditation, was roused to fury. In His anger Śiva opened His third eye and from it a flame attacked Kāma in such a manner that it reduced him to ashes (Saletore, *Op.cit.*, p. 661). Legend has it that on the *Vasant Pañcami* day Lord Śiva burnt the God of Love. But all these interpretations quietly differ from the *Kanda Purāṇam*'s version (*c.* 15th or 16th century A.D.) as well as with the folk myth of Kāmaṇ (which is dealt with later in this chapter). The demon Sūrapadmaṇ distressed all the gods so

much that they all desired to slay him. So Brahma sent Kāmaṇ to disturb Śiva's meditation and to pave the way for Lord Subra-
maṇiya's birth. Kāmaṇ carried out his wish and order by shooting
his floral arrows over Śiva. Naturally Śiva, the God of Destruction,
became furious and opened His third eye that erupts like a volcano
in which Kāmaṇ gets burnt instantly.

These versions are altogether different from the version of folk
myth *Kāmaṇ Kādaippāḍal* (dealt with in detail later under the
heading of 'Myth of Kāmaṇ Portrayed in little tradition' in this
chapter). But this sort of detailed reference on Kāmaṇ was not
available before the aforesaid literary work *Kāda Purāṇam*.
However, some references about Kāmaṇ are first found in *Kalit-
togai* (one of the works of *Eṭṭuttogai*, 'Eight Anthologies' of
Sangam Classics, c. A.D. 200). Women, in the quest of getting
married to their lovers or noble persons, worshipped Kāmaṇ by
offering him milk in his temple known as *Kāmaṇēl Kōṭṭam*
(*Kalitogai* 109). Worshipping Kāmaṇ in temple also got referred in
Cilappatikāram (the *Anklet*, 'Kaṇṇāttiṇam Uraitta Kāḍai', lines 60–
64), (A.D. 200) and later in *Cīvaga Cintāmaṇi* (A.D. 1000) – the two
great Tamil epics. Interestingly, Curamaṇcari, one of the heroines
of *Cīvaga Cintāmaṇi* takes the vow to offer 'the fish flag, the
flower arrows, the sugarcane bow and a chariot' to the god of love
Kāmaṇ if her wish of getting married to Cīvagaṇ is fulfilled (*Cīvaga
Cintāmaṇi* 2057).

In *Cilappatikāram* for the first time, Kāmaṇ is referred by the
name ('Kāḍalāḍu Kāḍai', line 55) and also as '*Uruvilāḷaṇ*'
('*Maṇaiyaṇampaḍutta Kāḍai*,' line 44), 'The formless one' which
suggests that he was destroyed in fire. His characteristics such as
holding fragrant flowers along with sugarcane bow and *makara*
flag also got mentioned in the epic ('Andimālaic Cīrappucey
Kāḍai', lines 81–83). With his proper name, 'Kāmaṇ' had been
described at several places in *Cīvaga Cintāmaṇi*¹ either with his

characteristics or royal signs. Since it is the Jaina epic which actually aimed at dislodging the sexual feelings, it had mentioned about Kāmaṇ at many situations just to show the other side of the coin. Similarly in the first Jaina epic *Cilappatikāram* ('Kaṇṭṭiṇam Uraitta Kādai', lines 60–64) also the worship of Kāmaṇ is shown in poor light. Dēvandi, the companion of Kaṇṇagi (the heroine), asks her to worship Kāma dēvaṇ for the safe return of her husband Kōvalaṇ, who had forsaken her for long and lived with a courtesan Mādhavi. But Kaṇṇagi refuses to do so and says that such a course of action would not be proper for a woman of her stature. This may be due to the tradition of Tamil women of that time worshipping only their husbands as their Lords, and not anybody else, not even Gods for any reasons.

But, contrary to this tradition, in *Nācciyār Tirumoli* (c. A.D. 800), Āṇḍāl, the foster daughter of Periyālvār and one of the twelve *Ālvārs* of Vaishṇavism, worships Kāmadēvaṇ for getting Lord Viṣṇu as her husband. It may be due to the religious pursuits of Vaishṇavism (which originally belongs to North India) and Aryan culture where Gods are invoked by the women for the safety and welfare of their men particularly husbands and brothers. 'Kāma is worshipped, though not strictly, sometimes.

In Bengal, where his images are not made, during marriages, for the general happiness of the couple and for progeny, he is invoked. In Cōḷa shrines in South India his triumph over Śiva is represented in the Dakṣiṇāmūrti image' (Saleatore, *Op.cit.*, p. 663). The Kerala women celebrate the destruction of Kāmaṇ every year (Seethalakshmi 1980: 219). In Sri Lanka too, the myth of Kāmaṇ is enacted as *Kāmaṇ Kūttu* (Folk play on Kāmaṇ) every year during the month of *Māci* (between mid-February and mid-March), on the third day after *Amāvāsai* (New Moon day) in the similar fashion of *Kathakali* tradition (Anthony Jeeva 1981: 18). In North India it is being celebrated as *Holi* festival.² There is no significant difference

between the *Kāmaṇ Paṇḍigai* and the *Holi* festival. Strikingly, both are being celebrated with bonfire, colour powders and sweets which witness pomp and gaiety of music, dance, *etc.*

A Brief Note About Kāmaṇ Kadaippāḍal

Kāmaṇ Kadaippāḍal – a folk myth chosen for the discussion here, was collected in the year 1985 from an old man of *Harijaṇ* community, Ēsupādam, then aged 65 years. He belonged to the Harijaṇ colony of Tiruttaṇi, Tiruvallūr District, Tamil Nadu. The narrator was a *tōṭṭi* (Village Scavenger) by profession.

Kāmaṇ Kadaippāḍal has three important units in its structure. The first unit describes the method of invoking Lord Viṇeśvara and seeking protection of the *grāma dēvatas* (Village Goddesses) from evil spirits in order to sing and perform the ballad without any obstructions. Followed by salutation to the audience, the balladeer humbly requests them to pardon him, if he commits any sort of mistakes while singing the story of Kāmaṇ. In the second unit, the story of Kāmaṇ is narrated. The third and the important one is a *Lāvaṇī* > *Lāvaṇi*³ (Tamil), which briefly debates whether Kāmaṇ was destructed by Lord Śiva or not.

Singing of *Kāmaṇ Kadaippāḍal* generally takes place during the *Kāmaṇ Viḷā* (The festival of Kāmaṇ) *i.e.*, the third day after *Amāvāsai* (New Moon day) of *Māci* (mid-February – mid-March) month and the *Paurṇami* (Full Moon day) of *Panguṇi* (mid-March – mid-April) month. It is also enacted to please the God of Rains, in dramas especially in Tiruchi and Tanjāvūr Districts and at Madurai during the *Vasant Utsav* of *Cittirai* month (mid-May – mid-June), (Somale 1975: 189). Besides these occasions, the *Lāvaṇī* is being sung on the 16th day while observing rites in the houses of Tamil Nadu, on the occasion of the death of family members.

The Myth of Kāmaṇ Narrated in Little Tradition

Lord Viṣṇu (God of Protection) in order to kindle the sex desire in human beings' bodies, for the smooth existence of the world, prays to Śiva (God of Destruction) for blessing Him with a son. Śiva obliges the wish and Kāmaṇ is born to Viṣṇu and Lakshmi. Nearly after four years, excited by a sexual desire, Śiva asks His wife Pārvatī to close her eyes and places a lemon in her hands. The innocent Pārvatī opens her eyes and sees the lemon and Rati – a beautiful girl is born. After a few years, both the heavenly parents admit their children in a school for their education. When Kāmaṇ attains the age of marriage, Viṣṇu approaches Śiva for an alliance seeking Rati as the bride for Kāmaṇ. Śiva gladly accepts the proposal. Both the divine parents consult an astrologer for an auspicious day and time for the marriage. The astrologer advises them to keep the name 'Maṇmadāṇ' instead of Kāmaṇ, as it was astrologically incompatible to Rati. At last, the marriage is celebrated with great pomp and show. All gods and *dēvas* grace the occasion.

Meanwhile, due to Dakṣaṇ, the father-in-law of Śiva (whose wife is Dākṣāyaṇī) who is observing *tavam* (Meditation) for some time with evil intention, the whole *dēvalōgam* (Skt. *Devlok i.e.* The World of Gods), starts reeling under extreme heat and feels suffocated. The entire population of *dēvalōgam* approach Śiva to save them from the calamity. Śiva considers their request and slays down Dakṣaṇ. As Śiva returns with great anger to *kailāsam*, the *dēvalōgam* starts to feel the heat once again. As a remedy for this, Indra orders Kāmadēvaṇ, the god of love to go immediately and disturb Śiva who was observing *tavam* after conquering Dakṣaṇ. Kāmaṇ, who had just then got married to Rati, is in a helpless situation. He has to go leaving his newly wedded wife alone, even without celebrating the very first night. Rati, having come to know about the journey of Kāmaṇ which would certainly disturb Śiva's

tavam, worries a lot and tries her level best to stop him from carrying out his duty. She expresses to him that she had had awful and ghastly dreams during the previous night and that may suggest the dire consequences, which are ahead waiting for him. She also expresses her sexual passion to Kāmaṇ and asks him to consider it as the genuine reason to stay back. When she finds Kāmaṇ very firm in his decision, she as a last resort, describes the greatness of Lord Śiva, Who cannot be dared to be questioned and touched by anybody. She narrates many popular deeds of Śiva and tries her best to stop him in proceeding to *kailāsam* on the assigned work. Kāmaṇ in turn counter argues Rati by describing the notorious deeds and shameful activities of Śiva. Besides, he narrates several popular deeds and majestic activities of Viṣṇu and expresses his strong belief over his father's strength and ability which would save him from any distress. But, Rati counteracts and tries to dismiss his argument by quoting several silly plays of Viṣṇu. Even then, at last Kāmaṇ, as an obedient and sincere subordinate of Indra, undertakes his journey and reaches the place where Śiva was observing *tavam*. He shoots Śiva by his celebrated floral arrows. Śiva at once gets disturbed and subsequently becomes terribly angry. Then He opens His third eye and the divine fire breaks out. At His mere glance Kāmaṇ gets burnt and reduced to ashes on the spot within no time.

This fatal end of Kāmaṇ appears to Rati in her dream. Messengers also confirm the gloomy and fatal end met by her husband. Naturally, Rati laments like any other woman on the loss of her husband. She, at once straight away rushes to *kailāsam* and argues with Śiva, her father for the injustice meted out to her by Him. Subsequently she agitates over the ghastly incident. Śiva tries to console His daughter stating the serious mistake done by Kāmaṇ and His helpless condition in this case. Giving up her agitation, the grief-stricken Rati beseeches Lord Śiva for mercy. She laments, prays and begs before Śiva to give her husband back alive at any cost. Śiva, hearing all emotional out bursting

of His daughter Rati, tries to console her that dead would never regain his life. He also explains the misconduct of Kāmaṇ and the crime that he committed against a God like Him which is deemed to be punishable. Ultimately, Śiva though relents in the beginning but moved later by the lamentation and persuasion of Rati, blesses and assures her that Kāmaṇ would come back alive but without a body (*anangan/uruvi-lāṇ*) and would be visible only to her. Though she can see him, he remains without physical form. Subsequently, Kāmaṇ gets his life back and Śiva blesses him to live happily forever with his wife Rati. Along with Śiva the entire *dēvalōgam* wishes them to have a quite joyful life. Thus, the story of Kāmaṇ, though mourning one, however, ends with a happy note. The balladeer, while concluding the story, wishes the entire audience also to lead a happy life at every sphere.

Lāvaṇi - The Unique Feature

Lāvaṇi, the third and the most important unit of the structure of the ballad, may be considered as a unique feature by its nature. Here two groups of people namely *Erinda Kaṭci* (Extinguished Group) and *Eriyāda Kaṭci* (Non-extinguished Group) who are capable of improvising songs on the spot, take part in a debate for and against the Kāmaṇ's destruction by Śiva. It is said that the word *lāvaṇi* is originally derived from the word *lāvaṇya* (Beauty). Also it is said that the word *lāvaṇi* came into existence in the meaning of composing songs on the spot like sowing the seeds or planting the seedlings in the farm. *Lāvaṇi* is an erotic song, which is presented along with a dance performance. It is a ballad like composition reported to have originated in Maharashtra. It became popular in Tanjāvūr district during A.D. 1684–1855, particularly after the period of King Sarfoji who ruled some parts of Tamil Nadu, having Tanjāvūr as his capital during 18th century. *Lāvaṇi* compositions in the Marathi language present folk rhythmic varieties. The boyhood

pranks of Lord Kriṣṇa have been favourite themes of the *lāvaṇi* composers.

In the *lāvaṇi*, the *Erinda Kaṭci* first begins the argument that Kāmaṇṇ was burnt by the flame coming out of the third eye of Śiva. They put the following questions to the *Eriyāda Kaṭci* to prove that Kāmaṇṇ was not destroyed.

Could you find out any person who attained salvation after worshipping Kāmaṇṇ? Have you seen any temple built up for Kāmaṇṇ? If so, tell us its location in favour of your argument. Is Kāmaṇṇ really responsible for the origin of living beings? Are you not satisfied from the *purāṇas* that you have come across the saying that Lord Śiva is the Supreme God? How peacocks do lay their eggs? Is it not due to oral ingestion of the semen split by the male during the dance and the female conceives? Is it not due to hearing the sounds made by the squirrels living in the nearby trees? If you claim that due to the valour of Kāmaṇṇ, children are born in the world, then why is there sterility in the earth? Have you not heard that a number of living things are being born in the world without any contact of *yonī*? Have you not seen that hens lay eggs after piling up the garbage and sitting on it? How is the effort of Lord Kāmaṇṇ evidenced in this? If it is so, prove it?

After such questions, the *Eriyāda Kaṭci* tries to succeed the *Erinda Kaṭci* by counter arguing and putting before them different sets of questions as follows:

Stop please! Stop please! Kindly tell us the way in which Kāmaṇṇ was burnt? Don't make noise like an empty vessel by simply singing some *tillāṇa* songs (a kind of folk rhythmic songs). You don't try to hoodwink anymore in this matter. Otherwise, if you stretch your argument furthermore unnecessarily, enmity would be created between us. O Lion of poets! Kindly tell us that due to whom, Indira got thousand eyes (means here female genitals) all over his body? Will you call it a lie what we find in the *Itihāsas*? Will you explain how Śiva approached Mohini and subsequently God Ayyappaṇ was born? Can you say who was responsible for

the Moon to lose its brightness? And can you suggest the person who is responsible for the origin and birth of creatures in the world? How could it have happened for Kāmaṇ who has a bow and arrows in his hands to be burnt to ashes? Do not continue to argue unnecessarily. If you do so, people would laugh at you. If you claim that Maṇmadaṇ was burnt, how could it be possible for the existence of generations in this world? If so, human beings should be like dolls and be impotent like eunuchs. It is certain that there are two Maṇmadaṇs, out of whom could you clarify which Maṇmadaṇ was burnt by Śiva? Was it the Maṇmadaṇ born out of the body of Śiva who is having His consort as a part of His self or was it the Maṇmadaṇ born to Viṣṇu and Lakshmi? You please tell the truth now, instead of prolonging the arguments anymore.

Thus, the debate goes on and on for a long time.

Probable Period of The Folk Myth

Though it is not possible to ascertain the accurate date of the ballad **Kāmaṇ Kadaippāḍal**, we could guess an approximate period and place it sometime after the **Bhakti Movement** (c. A.D. 600–900), based on the stories about the deeds of Lords Śiva and Viṣṇu mentioned in it. Before this period, Buddhism and Jainism were in the vogue and dominant religions in the land of Tamil Nadu. In order to stabilize the Hindu religion, Śaivism and Vaishṇavism, the two sects of Hindu religion worked hard and succeeded in their attempt. Though there were feuds between the sects mainly over the concepts of the Supreme God, however after some time both the sects came to understanding and reconciliation in not condemning each other openly, though the cold war continued to stay. This trend came into existence after the 10th century A.D. So we can assume the probable date of the myth *Kāmaṇ Kadaippāḍal* may be after the 10th century A.D.

While a set of stories are told to glorify some deeds of Śiva and Viṣṇu, another set of stories highlight the pranks of those two Gods enacted to degrade one another. The stories such as Śiva carrying Ganga on his head, asking for child's flesh, *etc.* are depicted as popular stories of Śiva and the stories like Śiva acquiring eyes of Kaṇṇappa Nāyaṇār (One of the Sixty Three *Nāyaṇmārs* of Śaivism), getting a beating from a Pāṇḍiya king, *etc.* are depicted as the stories of degrading Him). Besides, the stories such as Viṣṇu cutting a crocodile's head and rescuing the elephant, saving His devotee Prahalādaṇ and killing the devotee's father, the demon Iraṇiyaṇ (Hiraṇya), *etc.* are depicted as the popular stories of Viṣṇu. The stories where Viṣṇu cheating the king Mahābali and destroying him, having illicit relationship with a Muslim lady, picking up the dresses of *gopikas* while they were taking bath in the pond, *etc.* are mentioned and presented for degrading Viṣṇu. But, in both the ways, the ballad narrates the *Tiruvīlaiyāḍalgaḷ* (Sacred pranks of Gods) of the Supreme Gods, *viz.* Śiva and Viṣṇu. Thus, representing the presence of both the religions of Śaivism and Vaiṣṇavism, the ballad acts as a harbinger of these religions of Vedic period. Probably, the ballad might have evolved its present form and content during or after the period of Nāyaks, who ruled in various areas of Tamil Nadu during the 16th–18th century A.D.

After the chaotic socio-political conditions which prevailed during the 13th and 16th centuries, the Nāyaks hailed originally from Maharashtra and established their Kingdom in Tamil Nadu giving importance to Hinduism against Islam. Before their advent, the Muslim rulers converted many people to Islam by compulsion. On other side, Christian missionaries also started to convert thousands and thousands of people by their pro-social establishments such as schools, orphanages, hospitals, *etc.* Under these circumstances the rulers and socio-religious conscious people wanted to stop this kind

of mass conversions and showed interest in developing the status of the downtrodden. Though their main aims were to protect the power structure, the economic growth and to establish their control over the people, but indirectly kindled the spirit of safeguarding the Hinduism from the onslaught of foreign religions. With this motto in mind, writers tried to bridge the gaps then existed between Śaivism and Vaishṇavism in their works called *Paḷḷu* literature (a genre representing *dalit* literature under the category of *Prabandhas*). In this variety of literary works, the social structure, economic status and religious background of the *paḷḷar* (Land cultivators more or less in the sense of bonded labourers attached with farms) community were described aesthetically with the realistic background. All *paḷḷu* works mention that the protagonist *paḷḷan*, a Śaivite has two wives, *mūṭṭa paḷḷi* (Senior *Paḷḷi*) and *īlaiya paḷḷi* (Junior *Paḷḷi*). In almost all the *paḷḷu* works *mūṭṭa paḷḷi* is presented as a devotee of Śiva whereas the *īlaiya paḷḷi* is mentioned as a devotee of Vaishṇavism. They often quarrel with each other for the hold over their husband. In their inter-militant family feuds, they also severely condemn each other's sect, viz. Śaivism and Vaishṇavism, like the way the *Erinda Kaṭci* and *Eriyāda Kaṭci* in *lāvaṇi* clashing over the matter of elimination of Kāmaṇ. At last, their husband *paḷḷan* intervenes and sort out their problems and make them to live with him in harmony. In a way, the *paḷḷu* literature strived to bring Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava sects closer so that the Hindu religion could be consolidated and fight against the Christianity and Islam. Similarly, the myth of Kāmaṇ also strives to connect both the sects under one umbrella by the way of narrating many exploits of Śiva and Viṣṇu at par. Like *mūṭṭa paḷḷi* and *īlaiya paḷḷi* of *paḷḷu* literature, Rati and Kāmaṇ represent Śaivism and Vaishṇavism respectively in the myth to glorify overtly and criticize subtly. *Paḷḷan* symbolically performs here the role of Śiva who adhered to the request of Rati and resurrected

Kāmaṇ and thereby accommodating the both eventually for blessing them to live happily forever.

Myths Within the Myth and Message

The basis of every folk narrative is a myth or legend, exhibiting number of popular folk elements. Myths have been used as one of the main tools for preaching religious thoughts for a long time. They have also been used to wield control over society. There are a number of myths related to Śiva and Viṣṇu, that are mentioned in the course of narrating the myth of Kāmaṇ to demonstrate the Almighty status of God. Everyone has been forced to believe in the God by attributing the features of omnipotence and omnipresence to God. For example, there is one such story in the ballad, which explicitly states the omnipotence of the God Viṣṇu. Iraṇiyaṇ (Hiraṇya) forces his son Prahalāḍaṇ to worship him as God. But Prahalāḍaṇ disobeys and worships Viṣṇu. He described Lord Viṣṇu's omnipresence as follows:

He prevails everywhere and in everything.

He can be realized in the heart, even in the shadow.

He is the omnipresent.

In addition to the story of Prahalāḍaṇ, there are some other myths narrated within this myth to demonstrate the mighty prowess of the Gods Śiva and Viṣṇu. The stories such as Śiva taking away the force of Ganga on his head, which was flowing from *ākāś* to save the earth and swallowing the poison which emerged with *amrit* for the sake of saving the *dēvas* were depicted in the myth. Similarly Viṣṇu saving the elephant Gajendra from the crocodile and protecting the chastity of Draupati from Duśśāsaṇ were briefly described to infuse the confidence of faith over the God.

Moral Precepts Conveyed

In the course of narrating the myth of Kāmaṇ, the ballad preaches a few moral precepts. They are:

- * **The dead will never come back alive.**
- * **For every action there is a reaction.**
- * **The crime against the God is punishable.**
- * **No one should undertake a task which is beyond his/her capacity.**

After knowing the destruction of her husband Kāmaṇ, Rati requests her father Śiva to give life to him, as she was suffering immensely. At that moment, Śiva tells her in the following no uncertain terms:

O my beloved daughter! It is not possible to get alive anybody after their death. Death is final. There is no question of survival after the end!

He further explains to her:

If anybody commits an evil/mistake/sinful act deliberately or consciously, then there must be a punishment! That is preordained! Your husband Kāmaṇ purposely disturbed my *tavam* and he deserved the punishment which I had rendered. There is no way to escape from the castigation!

This explanation of Śiva explicitly cautions the people in general for not indulging in any activities of mischief against anybody and warns them to stay away from any kind of ill-conceived activities for the sake of their own welfare and happiness. The God here categorically outlines the moral:

“For every action there is a reaction”

There may be an excuse for one's misdeeds over others. If anyone repents for his/her misdeeds over others, then there could be atonement. But certainly, it could not be the case with the God and Saintly people. Hence, all religions in common proclaim that **“There is no excuse for our misdeeds over God.”** Śiva points out this moral to His daughter Rati, “Is it possible for anyone to survive in the world who opposes Me?” Above all, Śiva tells Rati:

Everyone should know their limitation and beyond that limit, no one should undertake any task. If anyone fails to realize this, he or she should be in distress. Your husband Kāmaṇ knowingly undertook a job beyond his capacity. That is why he is in distress.

Operation of *Karma* Theory

The law of *karma* invariably governs lives of all individuals irrespective of their status, caste, gender, age, *etc.* *karma* simply means the psychophysical actions of our body, speech and mind. The law of *karma* is postulated as follows: **“As you sow, so shall you reap”**. There are three negative actions of the body: killing, stealing and sexual impropriety, four of speech: Lying, abuse, divisive intent and idle gossip; and three of the mind: Ignorance, hatred and attachment. So ‘*karma*’ is regarded as a powerful bondage from which it is difficult to extricate oneself. It drags the souls like beasts. It is beginningless like seed-sprout continuity. It is of two types: (1) *Dharma* conferring merits and (2) *Adharma* resulting in sins’ (Tagore 1996: 75). *Karma* is responsible for all human experiences, enjoyable and otherwise, desirable as well as undesirable, *etc.* By non-performance of *dhārmic* acts and committing immoral deeds, the person contracts sin. ‘Both merits and sins are bondages which condition the transmigration of the soul. It is Śiva’s grace which releases man from this bond’ (*Ibid.*). The individual is responsible for his own fate. Literature in general and

folk narratives in particular sincerely reflect(s) the doctrine of *karma* in their discourses, as they were originating from the writers governed by such philosophies since beginning.

To signify the importance of fate, the folk myth *KK* has infused some stories and events. When *Kāmaṇ* is not listening to the genuine advice of his wife *Rati*, she narrates a few stories emphasizing fatalism to the former for giving up the idea of disturbing Śiva's *tavam*. One among them is the story of *Naḷaṇ*. The legend goes as follows: He was an emperor of one *Niḍada* country, having ruled from *Māvindam* as his capital. He was acclaimed as one of the '*Kaḍai Elu Vallalgaḷ*' (Seven Great Munificent) and one of the Six *Cakravartis* (Six Great Emperors). He married to one *Damayanti*, the daughter of *Bhīma* – the King of *Vidarbha* and led a quite happy life for some years. But as fate intervened, *Naḷaṇ* played the game of dice with one of his petty kings namely *Pushkaraṇ* (who pays tributes to him) as originally sent by *Sanīśvar* (the Saturn God), who was reeling under jealousy for some times. The King lost everything including his kingdom. So he proceeded to forest along with his wife after leaving children at his father-in-law's place. Soon in the forest, he abandoned his wife too, simply because of being not in a position to bear her sufferings at the cost of his stupidity and disappeared abruptly from there, later only to become a cook-cum-charioteer to the King of *Ayodhya*. His wife, after lot of difficulties, managed somehow to reach her father's place and lived with her children. But she was pondering over in sorrow, in the absence of her husband. After a while, she came to know the where-about of her husband. She managed to arrange another *svayamvar* (The choice of a husband by a princess made in public) for her by her father so that she can meet her husband and get united again. As she expected, *Naḷaṇ* came along with the King of *Ayodhya* as his charioteer and taught him the *mantra* of *asuva hridaya* and learnt the *aṭcha viddha* in turn from the King. As a

result, Naḷaṇ within no time got freed from the evil clutches of *Sanīśvar* (as the god can't keep the people knowing the *aṭcha viddha* in his custody anymore). At last, his wife (before the proposed *svayamvar*) was able to identify him by tasting the sumptuous dishes cooked by Naḷaṇ. Thus finally the disgraced Naḷaṇ got united with his wife and children. And he also got back his kingdom by playing the game of dice once again with the same petty king Pushkaraṇ and became triumphant over the latter. Once again, he started to lead the happy life but with wisdom ordained by maturity.

Thus Rati by narrating the story of Naḷaṇ, sincerely warns Kāmaṇ of his attitude but in vain. However, the grim hope subtly gets suggested here that Kāmaṇ too, like Naḷaṇ would successfully come out from the clutches of fate if he meets the similar sad end. Perhaps, this may be a cultural belief that even after the worst end, there may be a new beginning that would ensure a peaceful happy life. The philosophy of fatalism is thus got established in the myth of Kāmaṇ by the inference of Naḷaṇ's life. Probably, the myth of Naḷaṇ seems to justify the common man's thought and belief over the *karma* bindings as follows: "No one can be free from the evil clutches of fate or *karma*; one day or other, one has to undergo such painful experiences; but no one should lose heart but should develop a will to understand their mistakes and enough patience to come out successfully over the temporary setbacks". This is further corroborated also in the lamentations of Rati. She pathetically asks Śiva with due regard: "*Anru kaṭṭi andru arukka Araṇē nī eḷudalāmā?*" ("How could you write a note of fate that I should become a bride and widow on the same day itself?"). This in a way explains that the mind of common man, probably a Śaivite, believes that the God Śiva is engaged in writing of one's destiny other than anything else. But, he conveniently forgets that the God Śiva is supposed to destruct the lives of creatures (as per Hindu religion's theology),

rather than protecting them. The implied agenda suggested here is that the God Śiva is ‘the Supreme Being’ who takes care of everything in the world.

Dreams and Omens

Any ordinary man naturally tends to believe certain omens and dreams though they may not have any scientific value over the incidents and events happened to that person. Perhaps only the human beings have this unique psychological reflection while sleeping. Every one dreams, although many people do not remember some dreams or do not pay them any attention. Yet, dreams often contain significant information for us, putting light on what has happened in our lives, or what is happening and providing insights about our future. In many ancient traditions, dreams were considered to be messages from the gods. Dreams can mean several things to several people. However, there is a constant underlying theme or meaning behind our dreams and that is ‘messages’. In fact, dreams appear not for light entertainment. They may hold messages for us, past, present and future. Folk people strongly believe that dreams could serve as alarm bells for the dismal future. Folk myths invariably infuse a particular type of omens and dreams in their narrations. The myth of Kāmaṇ also stresses the faith regarding dreams that they forewarn people regarding impending doom. When Kāmaṇ was about to leave for disturbing Śiva’s *tavam*, Rati narrates to him the bad events that appeared in her dream of previous night:

O my Lord! Please listen to my words. I had a dream the previous night in which a child fell down from the cradle and died; the plantain and coconut trees, which were standing tall near our house and in the street, were uprooted; the royal elephant slipped down on the steps and died; the Pāṇḍiya kingdom was burnt and destroyed. So, my Lord! You don’t proceed.

From the above forewarnings of Rati, we can understand how certain inauspicious events become bad signs for the worst happenings waiting in the near future. It may be a fact that in certain situations dreams can provide a window into our subconscious mind. They reveal our deepest desires, fears, hopes and wishes that we might not even be aware of. When we have a particular type of dream repeatedly, it can reveal a larger theme that applies to our life. An interpretation to a kind of dreams reads as: “For a young woman to dream of a disaster in which she is a participant foretells that she will mourn the loss of her lover by death or destruction.” This is what seemed to have happened to Rati who loses her husband soon after the marriage before experiencing ‘the taste of conjugal life’. Falling down of a child from cradle, and so the royal elephant from steps, uprooting of plantain and coconut trees, the burning of Pāṇḍiya kingdom – all these explicitly mean the fatal end of their existence. Out of all these, the burning of Pāṇḍiya kingdom and its subsequent destruction in wild fire straightaway passes the message of the destruction of Kāmaṇ in the ‘*netrāgni*’ of Śiva. It may sound quite natural to any individual female having such kind of dreams in a state of mind worried for the safe return of her husband who went out on war-like missions. This is where omens were also playing their significant role in such situations.

Usually, even now those who have superstitious beliefs never move out of their homes when they come across a cat or a widow or a Brahmin while stepping out. Though the Brahmins happened to be enjoying higher social status due to various factors, the irony is that they are also categorized in the list of bad omens that need to be avoided while stepping out of home. Of course, these are all purely cultural beliefs that don’t carry any scientific values. But, this sort of custom had actually been ruling the mind of people since long. That has been clearly illustrated in the myth of Kāmaṇ very convincingly. Consider the following example: While Kāmaṇ

sets out to sabotage Śiva's *tavam*, a snake, a sage, a cat, a man holding new pots in his hand, a Brahmin, a woman carrying fire in her hand and a *karṇam* (Village Accountant) are crossing his path one by one. Even today, the people of Tamil Nadu usually never go out and proceed further while they cross a cat, a Brahmin and a *karṇam* (this community people also wear the sacred threads like Brahmins). Since the cats are found mostly in black colour by that they become inauspicious. Whereas, carrying the pot becomes inauspicious since that is identified as a part and parcel of death rituals. So the cultural belief sustains even after centuries. But why Brahmins and *karṇams* too become such bad species. It may be due to the historical fact that they were the people of Aryan ethnicity once migrated from North. And the native Tamils feel that these communities have been exploiting them for centuries simply by their 'shrewdness' with the tool of religious inscriptions and philosophies. So, the ballad having been originated from the non-elite people, invariably brands all of them as bad omens. As Kāmaṇ does not care for them, he meets his sad end soon, thus the bad omens get justified in the ballad.

Customs Reflected

Folk literature always tends to reflect the actual customs and traditions of people with sincerity. As they emerge out from the common man's mouth, the crude reality of the given society's civilization and culture, especially customs and beliefs get recorded quite naturally in its scheme of things. In fact, one can indeed rely upon folklore materials for understanding the true life and culture of common people (whose matter and subjects they describe), as they are wedded with authenticity. Name plays a vital role in anybody's life. While naming a new-born child, the actual time of child's birth and star of the day, *etc.* are taken into consideration.

When the child attains the marriageable age, the parents first seek the name of proposed bride/bridegroom and then with the name, they visit an astrologer to verify the aspects of horoscopes' agreements of the two to be married. When the two score more points out of 'the ten agreements' only, the marriage will be solemnized by parents or otherwise not. If parents of the proposed bride and bridegroom wish to celebrate their children's marriage at any cost for some reason or other, then they change the name of either bride or bridegroom or both and conduct the marriage with the changed name(s). This custom is still vogue in Tamil Nadu among all communities irrespective of caste, economic and educational factors. The story of Kāmaṇ reveals the aforesaid custom while the celestial parents decided to celebrate the marriage of Kāmaṇ and Rati. As Viṣṇu was very particular to seek the hand of His sister Pārvati's son Kāmaṇ for His daughter Rati, the astrologer changed the name of Kāmaṇ as 'Maṇmaḍaṇ' since that was not scoring more points of agreements. It is in the interest of keeping the blood relationship intact and continuing it for generations, the custom is very much prevalent in Tamil Nadu even today.

Another unique feature of *Kāmaṇ Kḍaippāḍal* is echoing a pathetic situation of woman, particularly a widow who undergoes both the physical and mental torture and humiliation at the hands of unkind people. On the death of her spouse, the woman loses not only her husband but also the grip over life and her status in the society. After the husband's death, *kungumam* (Saffron powder worn on the forehead usually by married women as a sign of auspiciousness), flowers and above all *tāli* (*Mangal Sūtra* i.e. Nuptial cord) would be removed respectively from the forehead, flowing hair/tresses and neck of the woman. Further her bangles would be crushed inhumanely. The ceremony is no doubt very painful and pathetic. So in earlier days, there was absolute insecurity to women. It is one of the reasons that they worshipped their

spouses but not Gods. Husband is everything to a wife. When Kāmaṇ seeks his wife Rati's acceptance before stepping out of home for the purpose of disturbing Śiva's *tavam*, she is not in a position to give her consent. She could imagine the immediate consequence of serious nature that would destroy Kāmaṇ at once. She fears that he would die. If he dies, then there will be no other way to her except self-immolation. Expectedly when Kāmaṇ dies, Rati weeps and puts many pathetic questions before Śiva.

O Lord! Is it right that You destroyed Kāmaṇ? Is it Your wish that I should give up the flowers in this pretty young age? O my Father! Did You wish the people to laugh at me for my husband's death? Did You wish they should curse me saying that my fate only killed him?

Thus the genuine queries raised by Rati clearly present a painful situation in which wives are believed to be responsible for their husbands' rise and fall, health and wealth and also for short and long lives. It needs to be mentioned here that because of such suppressed feelings and sorrowful outbursts, *KK* is more popular among the women folk of Tamil Nadu particularly during death ceremonies. The balladeer assuming himself as Rati, calls her near and dear to perform the ceremony of removing all the signs of wifehood *i.e.* *kungumam*, flowers and *tāli* and crushing of bangles. His 'weeping melodies' do make every woman wail and join him in mourning as well as if it had happened to them personally.

The balladeer Ēsupādam (expired few years back) was a *tōṭṭi* (Village Scavenger) by profession as stated elsewhere. Later, it was known that *KK* has been sung only by the *Harijan* community people in Tamil Nadu and mostly sung at the houses where death takes place. Since the ballad's main *rasa i.e.* 'central emotion' is pathos, these village scavengers use to sing at the house where people mourn the death with the intention of attracting women and others and thereby getting good amount of money from the people

gathered over there. Since the *Harijans* only take active part in the cremation rites for the people of Tamil Nadu except Brahmins, naturally they sing this ballad during deaths. While singing the story of Kāmaṇ, they try to highlight the laments of Rati who had lost her husband Kāmaṇ at a very young age. C. Raveendran, my former colleague, once observed during the discussion that this could be due to the religious belief that the person who had died would also exist without form like Maṇṇaḍal and would be blessed by God for attaining salvation. This could be connected with the performance of *karṇa mokṣa* episode of *Mahābhārat* sometimes performed in front of the house where death takes place. While enacting *karṇa mokṣa*, people believe that the person who died also would attain the same fame and status like Karṇaṇ.

Kāmaṇ As The Symbol of Sex

Kāmaṇ Kādaiṇṇāḍal is peculiar in the sense – it gives special attention to the feelings of sex. Kāmaṇ in the ballad is symbolized as ‘the feeling of sex’. Kāmaṇ is the God of Love as stated elsewhere. Here, love means lust, but in the sense of ‘aesthetic sensual feelings’ called ‘*kām*’ (Desire/Passion). It is the root for the birth, survival and existence of all creatures. Out of all creatures, it is only the human kind which enjoys the life fully to the maximum. As such, feelings can’t be shown in any particular form and shape. At the most, they can be only realized. That is why in order to denote sexual feelings, the Vedic religious philosophy, perhaps, created the Gods for this purpose. Metaphorically, it found *Kāmdev* (the God for Sexual Desire) to denote love. The noun *Kāmdev* becomes *Kāmaṇ* in Tamil (*kām+an*). ‘*An*’ is the suffix marker in Tamil used for denoting the male gender. In the similar manner *Yama* (from *yam*, ‘to curb’, etc. and hence *Yama*, ‘cessation’, ‘end’ i.e. the ruler and judge of the dead) is identified with the word

Kālaṇ in Tamil. *Kālaṇ* (*kāl+an*) simply means ‘Timekeeper’. *Kāla* (Time) symbolically here refers *Yama* since he takes away life of beings as and when their period of existence comes to end.

In the quest of symbolizing this blissful sense, man has created *Kāmaṇ* with all wonderful characteristics just opposite to *Yama*, the God of Death. Strikingly, Birth is considered an auspicious and the most joyful event in any one’s life whereas Death is always painful and mourning. So the paradigm of the life is Birth X Death. Obviously, keeping this in mind human beings see *Kāmaṇ* as the lovable God antagonized to *Yama*. Therefore, *Kāmaṇ* is often referred as a King with the royal qualities. Consider the following analogy: “Sugarcane is his bow; honey bee is its string; flowers such as *aravindam* (Lotus), *asōgam* (blossoms of ashoka tree), *māmpū* (blossoms of Mango tree), *mullai* (Jasmine), and *nīlam* (Indian Red water-lily) are his five arrows; fish is the royal flag; *ilañci* (a kind of tree spreading thick shadow) is his garland; grove is his *paḍai vīḍu* (encampment); females are his soldiers; coconut’s spathe of palms is his royal hand fan; jasmine is his fragrant betel leaf and nut; flat leaf of fragrant screw pine is his sword; parrot is his horse; the gentle breeze is his chariot; the dark is his elephant; sea is his royal drum; the sweet voice of koel is his exultation; the Moon is his royal umbrella” (Mudaliyar 1986: 1280). *Kāmaṇ* is said to have three kinds of bows viz. ‘*pū vil*’ (Bow made of flowers), ‘*karumbu vil*’ (Bow made of sugarcane) and ‘*irumbu vil*’ (Bow made of iron) only to attack *dēvas*, human beings and *asuras* respectively. All these fine and stimulating elements of nature just got attributed to *Kāmaṇ*, as he is the embodiment of sexual feelings. Whereas, when we compare the attributes of *Yama*, the God of Death, we could very well understand how the human mind perceives the undesirable event, though a natural phenomenon and unavoidable one in every body’s life. True to the terrific and frightening nature of Death, contrary to the depiction of *Kāma*, *Yama* is depicted as

dark, with his club (*gada*), noose (*pāśa*) and four hands. With the front two he shows the *abhaya* (Protection) and *varada* (Gift) *mudras* (Poses) while with the hind ones he carries the club and noose. He can also be seen with two hands, holding a noose in his right and a club in his left hand with his symbolic buffalo behind him. Such an image is seen at Chidambaram, Tamil Nadu. His symbols include a staff, sword, a flaming trident and a rosary (Sale-tore, *Op.cit.*, p. 1662). In the Vajrayāna pantheon, Yama is depicted as having the buffalo for his vehicle and in his two hands, holding a staff (*daṇḍa*) of death and the spear (*śūla*) (Ibid: 1663). His two regular messengers are two dogs, four eyed, broad-nosed, brindled (*śabala*), brown (*udumbala*) and are called the sons of *Sarama*. They guard Yama's path, delighting in the destruction of life (*aśutrṇ*), watching and wandering among mortals as Yama's messengers (Ibid, p. 1661). Thus, by all means, the characteristics attributed to the god of love and the God of Death were contrary in nature, as they stand for.

In the last part of *KK* i.e. *lāvaṇi* also Kāmaṇ is symbolized for sex. One group called *Erinda Kaṭci* argues that Śiva destroyed Kāmaṇ and another group called *Eriyāda Kaṭci* argues that Śiva destroyed only his feeling of sex. When Kāmaṇ wants to proceed with his assignment of disturbing Śiva's *tavam*, Rati says:

O My soul! Ye handsome Maṇmadha! You married me in the young age. But you are in a mood to leave me alone and move out, before we taste sexual pleasure? You see, the wedding saree and flowers which I wore are not even disturbed.

Thus she narrates the emotional feelings of sex to Kāmaṇ. Irony is that Kāmaṇ, the God of Love, who induces other beings for intercourse or copulation, never had such union and enjoyed the sexual pleasure. He had purposely avoided the opportunity even while his wife Rati, against the established socio-cultural norms, begged openly for such union.

Structural Analysis of Kāmaṇ Kadaippāḍal

The paradigmatic structural analysis of myth, as arguably, was first developed by Claude Lévi-Strauss whose theory was based on Saussurean notions of binary oppositions, sign systems, the signifier, sound and meaning, synchronic and diachronic, *etc.* His method is more appropriately applied to myths because in myths, unlike in tales, the oppositional elements cohere themselves so as to produce a semantic effect that is hidden message the culture conveys. The oppositions so found in myths are displayed, rearranged into meaningful logical paradigms so as to solve the different cultural dilemmas such as why man is mortal, how shrines came into existence, *etc.* “Myths are a complex system of structural units or parts, just like language which is made up of very complex linguistic systems. These units are not identical with one another. Language has its own norms, rules and the internal structure *etc.* what Saussure calls *langue*, a social and cultural phenomenon, which is not an individual’s expression of his thought, that is, *parole*” (Mani Meitei 1999: 194). We can recall here what Saussure says about these two important concepts: *La langue* is “the social side of language, outside the individual who can never create or modify it by himself; it exists only by virtue of a sort of contract signed by the members of a community and (*la parole*) is always individual and the individual is always its master” (*cf.* Krishnaswami, *et al.* 1992: 9)⁴. Therefore, a myth, like language is an impersonal collective system of abstract social norms, the meaning of which, if sought, cannot be found in the isolation of the units or in themes because the whole determines the actual and concrete manifestation. It is in this way how linguistic structuralism has influenced Lévi-Strauss’ myth analysis. The relationship between the linguistic structure and its context is analogous to the myth and its discourse. The mythic message derives from the interaction between the speaker and the listener, a condition governed

by the situation; physical and cognitive. In written literature, meaning is created as a result of the interaction between the reader and the text, therefore it is exclusively cognitive (Mani Meitei, *Ibid.*).

Mythic meaning is also produced through the sign system: the signified that is coded message, and the signifier that is the concrete form; and these are arbitrary in their relationship. Lévi-Strauss's myth analysis is thus inseparable from form and content. It is both synchronic and diachronic. Lévi-Strauss's own view may be quoted here:

The true constituent units of a myth are not the isolated relations but bundles of such relations, and it is only as bundles that these relations can be put to use and combined so as to produce a meaning. Relations pertaining to the same bundle may appear diachronically at remote intervals, but when we have succeeded in grouping them together we have recognized our myth according to a referent of a new nature, corresponding to the prerequisite of the initial hypothesis, namely a two-dimensional time referent which is simultaneously diachronic and synchronic, and which accordingly integrates the characteristics of *langue* on the one hand, and those of *parole* on the other (1972: 211–12)⁵.

The myth *Kāmaṇ Kadaippāḍal* seems to fit in the scheme of Lévi-Strauss's structural analysis. Consider the following arrangement:

I	II	III	IV
Union	Separation	Fury	Serenity
Śiva and Parvati; Viṣṇu and Lakshmi indulge in the act of producing their progenies Kāmaṇ and Rati respectively.	Śiva leaves behind Pārvati to slay down Dakṣaṇ, His estranged father-in-law, who was observing <i>tavam</i> with evil intention.	Śiva eliminates Dakṣaṇ for his demonic behaviour and becomes terribly angry.	Śiva observes <i>tavam</i> in-order-to calm down His terrific anger.

I	II	V	VI
Union	Separation	Death	Resurrection
Kāmaṇ, the son of Viṣṇu marries Rati, the daughter of Śiva.	Kāmaṇ leaves behind his newly wedded wife Rati and proceeds to sabotage Śiva's <i>tavam</i> .	Śiva reduces Kāmaṇ to ashes for his recluse action which caused for abandoning His <i>tavam</i> .	Śiva resurrects Kāmaṇ without his original form on the request of His daughter Rati.

VII	VIII	IX	X
Śaivism	Vaiṣṇavism	Extinguished Group	Non-Extinguished Group
Rati represents Śaivism by narrating glorious stories of Śiva and disgraceful stories of Viṣṇu.	Kāmaṇ represents Vaiṣṇavism by narrating glorious stories of Viṣṇu and disgraceful stories of Śiva.	A group of singers argue with reasons that Kāmaṇ was reduced to ashes in the <i>netrāgni</i> of Śiva.	A group of singers argue with reasons Kāmaṇ was not actually reduced to ashes in the <i>netrāgni</i> of Śiva but only His feeling of sex.

In order to understand the meaning of this myth, this arrangement of mythemes can be read column-wise, each column representing the bundle of relationships from left to right. The mythemes in each column exhibit a homogeneous relation. But the first and second columns contradict each other, so also column three and column four; five and six; seven and eight; and nine and ten. They can be put under the headings: **Union (Column I)** and **Separation (Column II)**, **Fury (Column III)** and **Serenity (Column IV)**, **Death (Column V)** and **Resurrection (Column VI)**, **Śaivism (Column VII)** and **Vaiṣṇavism (Column VIII)**, **Extinguished Group (Column IX)** and **Non-Extinguished Group (Column X)**.

The whole arrangement may be summed up thus:

Column I : Union	X Column II : Separation
Column III : Fury	X Column IV : Serenity
Column V : Death	X Column VI : Resurrection
Column VII : Śaivism	X Column VIII : Vaishṇavism
Column IX : Extinguished	X Column X : Non-Extinguished
Group	Group

The **First Column** is opposed to the **Second** and the **Third** to the **Fourth** and so on. Their relationship certainly is binary in nature. In other words, we can say that the **Column I** is to **Column II** as **Column III** is to **Column IV** and so on.

The myth of *Kāmaṇ Kādai* has Ten Columns. The **First Column** equals ‘**Union**’ which is the union of two opposites: men (Śiva and Viṣṇu) and women (Pārvati and Lakshmi). Man believes that even Gods also enter into wedlock and deliver their progenies like any other mortals. But he fails to understand that his analogy does not fit into the scheme of Gods as they are immortals and they never indulge in the act of copulation like him. It is to be seen here in the myth also Kāmaṇ and Rati were born to their celestial parents without any physical relationship. This is very clear in both the cases of Rati and Kāmaṇ. Rati was born to the Divine couple, Lord Śiva and Pārvati when the Former placed a lemon in the hands of the Latter and asked to open Her eyes to see the lemon by which act Rati is born. Similarly Kāmaṇ also was born to the other Divine couple Viṣṇu and Lakshmi. Strikingly, he was not born to Lakshmi out of Viṣṇu’s love, but from Viṣṇu’s mind directly – the moment Viṣṇu thought of him. So the usual birth and death events of human beings do not fit into the scheme of things of Gods. However, the folk myth as the product of common man represents such thoughts without any problems.

Besides, man also attributes all his qualities such as ego, eccentric characteristics, *etc.* to the Gods. Therefore, Dakṣaṇ and Kāmaṇ in the myth behave in such a manner not respecting the Supreme authority and their women folk. Consciously, man is not taking care of the immortality of Gods and their celestial qualities into consideration whereas he treats them with the same yardsticks applicable to him and his fellow human beings.

Column Two is just the opposite of **Column One**. The antithesis of **Union** is **Separation**. In the last Two Columns, we find each representing opposite notions of life. **Column Three**, for example, stands for **Fury** in terms of willful violation of existing norms by depiction of Dakṣaṇ's *tavam* by which act Śiva slays down and becomes terribly furious. In another instant, Kamaṇ willfully violates the *dharmic* law by disturbing Lord Śiva's *tavam* for which he meets the sad end out of the fury of the Latter. As opposed to this, there is **Serenity** represented by the **Column Four**. The column represents the serenity of Śiva in two occasions: One at destroying Dakṣaṇ, His father-in-law; Second at reducing the Kāmaṇ, His son-in-law for his recluse act. It is interesting to note that Śiva, the God of Destruction honestly carries out His duty in both the cases without any lenience and subsequently punishes His father-in-law and son-in-law though they were His very close relatives. **Anger or Fury and Serenity are the Two Columns**, just attributed to Śiva in this myth. Anger and Desire are considered as the worst two enemies of mankind that need to be extinguished by possible means. Anger is momentary madness. So it needs to be controlled or otherwise that will kill the person's mental peace and stability. Becoming angry is natural to any human beings. But what is expected is that one should realize its repercussions and get away from it by observing the path of serenity. That would bring peace of mind and subsequent happiness not only to the person who perpetuated on others but also to the

people affected by that venom. So probably in order to stress the human beings to behave in such a manner of observing serene, slow-pulsed, and calm with issues and things, the binary oppositions ‘fury and serenity’, seems to have been represented by the act of Śiva becoming angry and serene in the myth. After becoming cooled down only, Śiva understands the agony of Rati and concedes to her wish to resurrect her husband, who was reduced to ashes due to anger. As to represent resurrection: Kāmaṇ regains the life as formless one after his original fatal end met out of Śiva’s wrath. Thus, the Almighty vanquishes Kāmaṇ and the beings like him who pose a threat to it and to protect the righteousness. So the destruction of those who transgress *dharma* happens as a consequence and is not His intention.

Human kind believes that **Death** is certain and no one or nothing can escape from its jaws. At the same, it is believed that the *ātma* of the person who is dead may live without any form. Therefore, people of all communities worship their ancestors in particular days every year. They believe in the **Resurrection** of their dears who are no more to be seen physically. This is what probably meant here about Kāmaṇ’s **Destruction** and his subsequent **Resurrection** in the respective **Columns** of **V** and **VI**.

As male and female belong to two different sex categories of binary oppositions, it is quite natural that they perceive the men and matters, subjects and things and so on from their own point of views that often reflect non-compatibility. But still they have to adjust with each other for the sake of their family and lead the life in society. It is always women in India who act as self-appointed lawyers for their mother and father; brothers and sisters, *etc.* and confront with their husbands and other members of his people as and when some issues crop up. But, it is men generally who dominate and supersede their counterparts on contradictions, seldom worried for consequences. Here, Rati and Kāmaṇ as such represent

Śaivism and **Vaishṇavism** respectively and argue vehemently to win over the other. But it is Kāmaṇ who did not heed to the advice of Rati and finally set out on his mission to sabotage Śiva's *tavam* without worrying for consequences. At another level, we can also see the reasons for the co-existence of two sects of Hinduism, viz. Śaivism and Vaishṇavism, though contradicting each other on many issues but exist for centuries in Tamil Nadu with lot of understandings. Primarily, Tamil Nadu is acclaimed as the land of Śaivism as against North India, where Vaishṇavism is dominant sects prevailing over the other.

In all respects, the myth of Kāmaṇ evolves around the notion in establishing the Supremacy of Śaivism by downplaying the Kāmaṇ and Vishṇu. From the beginning to the end of the story, the Supreme status of Śiva is upheld and maintained thoroughly. It is Śiva who granted the boon to Vishṇu, who approached him and prayed for a son, though the Former is not the God of Creation. Then, it is again Vishṇu who first proposed to the marriage of Kāmaṇ and Rati. Further the myth narrates the sad demise of Kāmaṇ getting reduced to ashes in the *netrāgni* of Śiva, though the former pinned the hope on his father Vishṇu, the God of Protection, who would protect him from any calamities. Sadly, it is not so. Vishṇu never arrives in picture after the marriage of Kāmaṇ. It is only Rati who argues and confronts Śiva on the matter of Kāmaṇ's destruction. Again it is Śiva, moved by the lamentation and persuasion of Rati, who resurrects Kāmaṇ at the end and blesses him to lead a happy life forever. At this situation, all the gods by their presence invariably recognize the supreme authority of Śiva and joined him in blessing the couple quite happily. Thus, it is clear that the myth just places Śaivism on the top as the Supreme religion of Hindu Pantheon of Tamil Nadu and Śiva as the Supreme Being in which all gods merge and accept His Supremacy. This kind of

binary opposition between Śaivism and Vaishṇavism seems to have justified by the **Columns VII and VIII**.

In the *lāvaṇi* also, the aforesaid paradigm explicitly operates between the *Erinda Kaṭci* (**Extinguished Group**) and *Eriyāda Kaṭci* (**Non-Extinguished Group**). Both the groups try to win over the other by presenting a lot of interesting facts and figures on destruction of Kāmaṇ or otherwise. It is very natural that any adult person irrespective of gender, status, *etc.* would be hooked down by the feeling of sex at some time or other. The ‘basic instinct’ can play the spoilsport with any ordinary person’s life. But only the determined people control it consciously for the purpose of achieving something greater than the sexual pleasure in their life. Very extraordinary people, who are being wedded with noble causes and so firm and determined in their thought and action may completely dislodge the ‘basic instinct’ from their mind permanently. But it is not that easy at all. It needs a lot of will and practice that undergo painful sufferings. Here, we could assume that the *Erinda Kaṭci* and *Eriyāda Kaṭci* represent respectively on and against the destruction of Kāmaṇ. The ‘basic instinct’ wins over almost all the people, whereas only a few mighty people control or suppress it completely and become really successful in their life with ever greatest achievements. Perhaps, the **Columns IX and X** suggest the aforesaid interpretation convincingly.

Myths are a rich repository of cultural norms and social conduct that lie hidden. The exhibition of these hidden properties of a society makes us understand certain things which are not explicitly discussed before elsewhere. The myth of Kāmaṇ story in a way conveys certain philosophical and social messages. As observed by Morris Freilich, “The sense or message of a myth is well hidden and clues must be gathered by digging into the set to which a given myth belongs” (1977: 224-25)⁶. The coded message in *Kāmaṇ Kādaiṇṇāḍal* is many-fold. The impure *ātmas* tend to do

awful mistakes either knowingly or otherwise. If anyone violates religious norms then always there certainly exists punishment from which nobody can escape. The ultimate goal of *ātmas* is uniting with the Lord. Till then, the *ātmas* would be in distress and painful life. Respecting women is a clear social message imparted through the myth of Kāmaṇ story. Neglecting women folk often leads to a miserable life. There are several instances elsewhere to support this argument. According to a legend, Dakṣaṇ was seriously advised by his daughter (who was none other than the wife of Śiva), to formally invite Lord Śiva and honour Him properly for His Supreme authority over Gods, when he was conducting *yajña*. Instead of listening to her words, he ridiculed her and ordered her to get out of the place which pained her much. Had he respected her words of advice, he would not have died at the hands of Lord Śiva later. Similarly, Kāmaṇ also neglected his wife Rati's sincere efforts to stop him from proceeding to disturb Śiva's *tavam*. It is widely a known fact that in Aryan culture, women folk were being neglected for ages and subjected to lot of humiliation and sufferings. But the Dravidian culture is originally known for its female dominated social system called 'Matrilineal Social System'. In this social system, females are very powerful and they had exercised their independence on several matters. It is to be noted that the women folk were the original cultivators of land by which they exercised a lot of power over their counterparts. As a matter of fact, it is to be noted here that the dominant folk deities in South India are invariably women. The myth of Kāmaṇ story, though it belongs to Tamil Nadu, strangely represents the traditional culture of Aryan people since the theme originally came from their *purāṇas*.

Like any other myth, in the Kāmaṇ story also binary oppositions become crucial and these oppositions are mediated to resolve certain socio-religious issues and themes. "The solution lies in the mediation between the contradictions, and the mediator is the

message. Therefore, to identify the mediator is of utmost importance. Myths are associated with providing socializing effects to its carriers. Myths seem to teach, consciously and subconsciously, from childhood to adulthood, to the members of a community about the forms of accepting laws and constraints, which may again appear in the patriarchal authority and so on. The tension between the opposite norms needs to be contained: This seems to be the core content of the myths. In the process the smart norms are to be transformed into proper norms. Smartness belongs to space, the world of nature and objects, and properness pertains to time that is culture, thought and concepts” (Mani Meitei, *Ibid.*, p. 197). Rati is here the mediator in the myth, who can convert smartness into properness, nature into culture, space into time. Because of her middle position, she is in a constant state of conflict. It is the conflict with her husband Kāmaṇ and her ability to mediate with her father Lord Śiva respectively which make Rati’s position so important in the myth and elevate her as the darling tragic heroine of women folk of Tamil Nadu.

This brief study tries to highlight some important findings. It shows that a myth is a cultural product in as much as it is the dream of a culture. Therefore, what probably seems necessary when a myth is analyzed structurally is to have intimate knowledge of the myth and its cultural setting. The identification of mythic problems as posed by binary sets and the solution or displacement of the difficult social dilemma through mediator naturally becomes the message of the myth. More often than not, this message is coded as hidden, and contains the cultural consciousness, and is communicated through the medium of highly symbolic communication language.

Thus the folk myth *KK* narrated in verse form, sincerely puts all its efforts to reflect the society by every possible manner. As a matter of fact, it indeed presents the true picture of the society’s

beliefs, customs, *etc.* where it had originally evolved. Still, in the current era of Television and Computer age, this folk ballad stands alive and quite popular among the folk people of Tamil Nadu for centuries beyond especially for its mourning theme and rhythmic beauty.

Notes

- * Revised Paper of the article published in the book: *Indian Folklore*, Prof. Indira Goswami and Dr. P.C. Pattanaik (Eds.), B.R. Publishing Corporation, Delhi, 2001. My sincere thanks to the Editors and the Publisher.
- 1. *Cīvaga Cintāmaṇi* - Poems: 43, 458, 490, 599, 664, 1428, 1598, 1715, 2003, 2047, 2052, 2065, 2761, 3027.
- 2. In Tamil Nadu and Kerala, where *Holi* – a festival of myriad colours, of gaiety, of friendship and reunion, is celebrated as *Kāmaṇḍa*, *Kāmaṇḍa Paṇḍigai*. Indeed, *Holi* is popularly known as *Kāmadagaṇam* in Tamil Nadu. The festival, however, is not celebrated with as much intensity in the South as that of North India. But people do indulge in merrymaking. The folk songs sung during *Holi* are melancholy songs, which narrate the pathetic tale of Rati, the wife of Kāmaṇḍa. In a sense, the festival is celebrated as the victory of spiritual bliss over material desires. *Holi* is the most colourful festival of Hindus and falls on the Full moon day in the month of *Phālgun* (March) according to the Hindu calendar. *Holi* heralds the arrival of Spring – the season of hope and new beginnings and marks the rekindling of the spirit of life. Gulmohurs, corals, silk-cotton and mango trees start flowering, garden and parks present a glorious spectacle of a riot of colours – crimson, red, pink, orange, golden yellow, lemon and a variety of glittering greens. Men who remained indoors during the cold months of winter emerge out to see a new sparkling world of colour and gaiety. The flowers breathe out their fragrance into space and brooks and streams leap in the valleys. Men rejoice with brilliant light of day

and the eloquent silence of night. And then the joy bubbling in their hearts find expression in dance, drama and music.

In those days, Holi was celebrated as *Vasantotsav*. Acclaiming it as a spring festival Māhākavi Kālidās has called it *Madanotsav*. In Punjab, the *Holi* is celebrated as the festival of ‘*Lori*’ (the festival of Agnidev). On the eve of *Holi*, huge bonfires are lit with logs of wood, basketful of cow dung cakes, ghee, honey and the new crop fresh from the fields. When the fire leaps up in high and strong flames all those present, walk around the bonfire seven times, pray and invoke the blessings of Agnidev. Women prepare delicious sweets and put in the bonfire as *naivedya* (Offerings) to Agnidev. When the fire lies down, water is splashed on the embers and the ash from the extinguished fire is applied on the forehead by everyone. Some of the ash is preserved in the house all through the year to apply to the foreheads of children as an effective remedy against any impending evil.

3. **Lāvaṇī:** Lāvaṇī > Lāvaṇi (Tamil) is a folk form of Maharastra origin. They are ballad like compositions meant specifically for the enjoyment of the lay people. They are in the form of puzzles and answers. In order to acquaint the masses with *purāṇas* and holy writings puzzles on such topics are put and answers are also provided. It is an interesting and entertaining method of religious instruction. They were popular during the reign of Marāṭha rule in Tānjore. Marāṭhi *lāvaṇīs* and *lāvaṇī* singers were patronized by the kings of Tānjore. The term *lāvaṇi* in Marāṭhi means an ‘off shoot’. It refers to the extempore or spontaneous music created on the spot. It was also called ‘*Nilāvaṇī*’ in Tamil. *Lāvaṇīs* in Marāṭhi are usually sung during the period between the *Vasanta Pañcami* and *Ranga Pañcama* in connection with the *Holi* festivals. The accompaniments used are the ‘*Ranga Vādyā*’, the Deph, and Tuntina. *Lāvaṇi* singing was a group and collective affair and never done individually. The group of *lāvaṇi* singers is known as Gheer. Shāheer is the head of the group. Only men took part in the *lāvaṇi* singing. Maharastra *lāvaṇīs* have been in vogue since 15th century onwards. Saint Samarthā Rāmadās, the preceptor of Śivāji the Great, was the earliest composer of *lāvaṇīs*. Rām Joshi, Sagan Bhāū, Honāji Bālā, Paraśurām Easu, Ananta Phandhī, Mādhvamuni and Amritārāi were famous composers of

lāvaṇīs... Since the music used is simple, catchy and easily enjoyable, these compositions found an appeal among the masses. Regarding the structure of the *lāvaṇīs*, they are the pieces with the *dhrupada*, corresponding to *pallavi* and followed by many *caraṇas*... The chief of each group known as Shāheer was a talented singer and poet, must be able to compose on the spot. The theme of the *lāvaṇi* may be philosophical, historical, devotional or erotic. Usually high philosophical disquisitions and descriptions of nature form the central theme. The two opposing parties of *lāvaṇi* singers on the occasion of the spring festival, enter into a musical debate arguing for and against the problem chosen, through the medium of the songs. Of the many groups of *lāvaṇi* singers, few are dedicated to sing the glories of Lord Śiva while the other groups advocate the greatness of Viṣṇu and when two such parties enter into a musical contest it used to be a thrilling experience... The *lāvaṇīs* sung and composed by one group are as a rule never sung by the opposite group. The Marāṭha kings who were themselves musicians and composers enthusiastically promoted the art of *lāvaṇi* singing in Tānjore (S. Seetha 1981: 360-362). The presence of obscene language is occasionally found in highly erotic *lāvaṇīs*. These are usually sung during the occasion of *Kāmaṇ Paṇḍigā* or *Manmatha Festival*. The theme of the Tamil *lāvaṇīs* is to hold a discussion as to whether Manmatha was burnt or not by Lord Śiva. Of the two sets of *Lāvaṇi* singers, one set supports the statement while the other opposes it. These are called *Erinda Kaṭci* (Extinguished group), *Eriyāda Kaṭci* (Unextinguished Group). The festivals mentioned above were largely attended. *Lāvaṇi* singing usually begin at night about 8 '0' clock near the temple precincts on these occasions and used to continue till early morning. It was once a regular feature in the temple festivals and the art of singing *lāvaṇi* is slowly dwindling into insignificance with the extinction of the Marāṭha rule (S. Seetha 1981: 365-366). (For more details see: S. Seetha, *Tanjore as a seat of Music*, University of Madras, Madras, 1981, pp. 360-366).

4. Krishnaswamy, N., S.K. Verma and M. Nagarajan, 1992, *Modern Applied Linguistics*, Madras: Macmillan India Limited (As quoted by M. Mani Meitei 1999: 194).

5. Lévi-Strauss, Claude, 1972, *Structural Anthropology*, Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books (As quoted By M. Mani Meitei, *Ibid.*).
6. Freilich, Morris, 1977, 'Lévi-Strauss' Myth of Method', in *Morphology in Oral Literature*, Heda Jason and Dimitri Segal (Eds.), The Hague: Mouton (As quoted by M. Mani Meitei 1999: 196).

Chapter – 3

Tamil Siddhas and Vīraśaiva Śaraṇas: Souls Searching for Ultimate Reality and Heavenly Bliss*

The primary goal of their life and work was to show people suffering from the evils of the contemporary socio-religious system and institutions way out, a way towards a new socio-religious order based on freedom and individuality against the contemporary Brahman religion and thereby showing the door to the doctrines and ideology associated with the latter.

We Indians have a strong opinion that it is because of the Christian missionaries that we were awakened and became socially and culturally progressive. While giving the due credit to the foreign missionaries for their role, we are somehow forgetting and becoming ungrateful to our own missionaries/socio-religious seers and prophets of medieval period, who had tirelessly worked hard for the same cause with no self-interest. Throughout the country, we come across a number of such socio-religious leaders and prophets, who aimed and served for the upliftment of the society. Through their teachings, poetry and pious actions, they had kindled the fire of reforms, which had become a conducive situation for the Christian missionaries in leading people to the progressive path. In fact, some of our socio-religious leaders and

prophets were more progressive and revolutionary than the Christian missionaries.

In the medieval period, there were several socio-religious leaders and their followers throughout the country, who, without knowing each other's thoughts and activities, shared similar progressive views on socio-religious system. As a case study, let us take a comparative look at the *Siddhas* (*Cittars*) of Tamil Nadu and *Śaraṇas* i.e. *Vīraśaivites* of Karnataka during post 11th century developments. "The Tamil Siddhas have their counterparts in the *Vacanakāras* of *Vīraśaivism*. The poems of the Bauls of Bengal, Kabīr and his followers are very similar to the messages of the Tamil Siddhas. The Siddhas were revolutionaries in that they challenged the authority of the scriptures and condemned ritualistic ceremonies and the caste system in particular" (Francis 1990: 22).

The Bhakti movement, which was founded and propagated by *Nāyaṇmārs* of Śaivism and *Ālvārs* of Vaishṇavism of Tamil Nadu during A.D. 600–900, started to recede in its strength and vigour from 10th century A.D. onwards. Vedic religion, through temple and priestly class, had gained an upper hand. Everyday life of people was very much determined by religious leaders. "It was a time when the caste system had a wide social acceptance and the low-caste people were treated as slaves. Religion became more and more institutionalized and authoritarian in nature and sectarian in outlook. Rigid dogmas were established, religious rules came into being and one could not but bow down before the Tables of the law. And people blindly followed religion by social habit in order not to get into the bad books of others. Rituals and ceremonies were rampant. Too many saints and seers paved the way for various systems of intellectual philosophy, which only divided the people into rival groups. Since each group spent much of its time in defending itself against its rival ones in matters relating to sectarian religion and philosophy, the genuine moral and spiritual values

were ignored. The fanatics were not in a position to understand that the knowledge of God is not to be gained by weighing the people's arguments of reason for or against this existence: it is to be gained only by a self-transcending and absolute consecration, aspiration and experience" (Raja 1990: 333). Though the **Bhakti Movement** originated in Tamil Nadu as a socio-religious movement of the masses in the 6th century A.D., with the Brahmins and higher caste *Vellālas* in the forefront, by the end of the 9th century A.D., it had lost its agenda. The low caste non-Brahmins felt that there was no place for them since that had accommodated all elements of the Vedic religion. In such a situation, the low caste non-Brahmins of Tamil Nadu revolted against the existing bhakti tradition and wished to create a sort of new religion based on wisdom and spirituality. Thus, there arose **Siddha Tradition** (c. A.D. 1000–1500).

The Cōla kingdom, which emerged in the second half of the ninth century starting with Vijayāla Cōlaṇ (A.D. 850–871) and ending in A.D. 1279 with Rājēndra Cōlaṇ III (A.D. 1246–1279). This period, considered as the golden one in the history of Tamil Nadu gave vital importance to Brahmins. A number of temples were constructed (which paved the way for *Devadāsi* system) and the Vedic religion gained supremacy. By virtue of their knowledge and positions, the royal *gurus* and priests of the temples could exercise their power through the kings. Virtually, everyone was made to listen and act according to the advice of this Brahmin community. During the period, the kings offered a vast area of land to this community in the name of *Brahmadeyam* and *Devadhānam*. By all means and matters, Brahmin community became more powerful during this period and they fully exploited the power for their own benefits. This religious development also acted as a causal factor of the emergence of **Siddha Cult** or **Siddha Tradition** in Tamil Nadu.

In the context of Tamil tradition, “a Siddha is a revolutionary and non-conformist in his beliefs and practices”, thus says R. Balasubramanian in his foreword to the book *The Philosophy of the Tamil Siddhas*¹. He further writes in his foreword: “Though the Siddhas are non-conformists in their theory and practice, they are not anti-social. They never thought that the pursuit of spirituality requires withdrawal from the world. On the contrary, they maintained that remaining in the world, one could practice spirituality and attain unity. They were concerned with the upliftment of the human beings, and so their teachings are intended for the people”. So naturally Siddhas have protested against the traditional mode of worship and religious observances which were hindrances to the spiritual life of human beings. They also questioned the caste based social hierarchal system known as *Varṇāśrama Dharma*. “By the way, they were also known for their ability to perform miracles in the service of society. Hence, they were often mistaken for atheists and agnostics. But they have never deviated from the fundamental beliefs of Śaivism” (Francis, *Op.cit.*, p. 3). Understandably, the Siddhas are compared to the Sufis and the Gnostics (Iyer 1969: 3). In a nutshell, we could say that “A Siddha is a person who has achieved a state of spiritual enlightenment or mystical self-realization. He is a completed one, fulfilled and accomplished, a God-realized being alive in the world for the sake of mankind and all living beings” (Ganapathy 2004: 13).

A Siddha is an individual turned into a spiritual being... He is a seer, a highly evolved and realised soul. He is the one who is conscious of the Divine presence in the psychic. Everything else appears to him absolutely without importance. His entire life, all his activities, all his movements continue, if circumstances so arrange things, but they all seem to him profoundly unimportant.[...] He has one aim, one desire and one goal: to know the Divine and to unite with Him, by every possible means and with the help of faith. To attain his goal, a Siddha renounces everything in this

world (Raja, *Op.cit.*, p. 333). A Siddha is one who has attained *Siddhi* i.e. “power, prowess, strength, ability”, then a special kind of psychic² and supernatural, miraculous occult power (Zvelebil 1973: 225).

They spoke of their religious experience chiefly from the yogic point of view. “Those who live in *yoga* and see the divine light (*Oḷi*) and power (*Sakti*) through *yoga* are the Siddhar” (*Tiruman-diram (TMM)* 1490), thus says Tirumūlar, the Śaiva mystic, considered as the father of Siddha tradition. Siddha is one who fervently wishes and prays: “Lead me from the unreal to the Real, from the darkness to the light, from the death to the immortality”.

“Siddhar in general believed that the world is real not illusory. ‘Liberation’ (*Mutti* (Tamil) < (Skt.) *Mukti*) – in contrast to *Bhakti* is achieved through knowledge; it is a liberation from the idea of evil and pain. Suffering ceases as soon as one understands that it is exterior to self. It is destroyed by ignoring it as suffering. This true knowledge is obtained in entasis (*Samādhi*) which is achieved by practice, by physiological yogic techniques” (*Ibid.*, p. 228).

Traditionally, the Tamil Siddhas trace their origin to Agastya and to various works on mysticism, worship, medicine and alchemy ascribed to him. Very little is known about the actual life and date, i.e., the biography, of the Siddhas. Siddhas are eighteen in number according to the local tradition, though we come across many more names of Siddhas. The prominent Siddhas are Śivavākiyar, Paṭṭiṇattār, Bhadragiriyār, Agappēyc cittar, Aḷugaṇic cittar, Iḍaikkāṭṭuc cittar, Kaḍuveḷic cittar, Kudambaic cittar, Pāmbāṭṭic cittar, Kongaṇār, Karuvūrār, Kambaḷic caṭṭaimuṇi, Kāgapusuṇḍar, Pīr Mohammad, Vālaisāmi, Lōgāyadar, Ēṇādi, Nandīśvarar, Tiruvaḷḷuvar, Gaṇapati, etc.

Siddhas were basically masters of autology – the science of the self. They stressed the need for each individual to develop his own psychic powers by *yoga* and see and experience God within him-

self. They do not believe in the idea of God existing in an idol. They experienced the God within themselves. So they were not in favour of temples and related religious activities. They strongly believed in the omnipresence of the God but not the Godhead Śiva. While all Siddhas uniformly put forward the idea of realizing the God in the heart and rejecting the idol-worship, temple culture, *varṇāśrama dharma*, *etc.* but they had voiced different opinions with regard to women, importance of body, *etc.* Some of the Siddhas like Śivavāṁkiyar, Paṭṭiṇattār are very critical of women folk, as they perceived them as one of the root causes for miseries. While a few Siddhas like Paṭṭiṇattār, Pāmbāṭṭic cittar, Kaḍuveḷic cittar disregard the importance of body, but most of them like Tirumūlar had positive and reverential view on the human body as they considered it as a *kshetra*, an abode to attain ‘the Liberation’ from the painful worldly life.

If body is destroyed, soul is destroyed
And one will not attain true powerful knowledge
Having acquired the skill to foster the body
I cherished the body I and I fostered the soul
(TMM 704), (Tr. Kamil Zvelebil)

Thus, Tirumūlar points out the importance of body. Paṭṭiṇattār categorically submits his realization to the mind to disregard the human body (*Kōyil Tiruagaval*, hymn 1: line 5). The other Siddhas such as Pāmbāṭṭic cittar and Kaḍuveḷic cittar also join him to highlight more of human body’s filthy nature: as the vessel of foul smell (*Kōyil Tiruagaval*, hymn 2: line 11; *Pāmbāṭṭic cittar*, hymn 60); as a bubble on the surface of water (*Kōyil Tiruagaval*, hymn 2: line 32; *Pāmbāṭṭic cittar*, hymn 64; *Kaḍuveḷic cittar*, hymn 3), *etc.*

As a matter of fact, all Siddhas were householders at some point of time or other in their life but later they turned as seers/sages after witnessing lot of troubles personally. In the quest of

enjoying the spiritual bliss forever, later they abandoned their homes, only to live in caves located at mountains and forests. However, “renunciation, detachment from society and formal asceticism are not the ways of the Siddhas. To be spiritual is not to be insensitive to the problems of the common man. Siddha spiritually does not require withdrawal from the world or organized movements or dogmas. It is coterminous with the existence of humanity” (Ganapathy, *Ibid.*, p. 189).

Siddhas were highly educated and had the understanding of the *vedas*, *upanishads*, *āgamas*, *purāṇas*, etc. though they hailed from low non-Brahmin castes. They produced a typical variety of mystical poems through which they expressed their perceptions and experiences in a highly enigmatic language. Their poems have a number of features in common: “a protest, sometimes expressed in very strong terms, against the formalities of life and religion; rough handling of priests and Brahmins in general; denial of the religious practices and beliefs of Brahmanism, and not only that: an opposition against the generally accepted pan-Indian social doctrine and religious practice; protest against the abuses of temple rule; emphasis on the purity of character; claims made by the authors of these poems that they have achieved certain psycho-kinetic powers and other capabilities which belong to the sphere of para-psychological phenomena; use of imaginative and ambiguous language; rather puzzling, though strongly colloquial; no systematic doctoral exposition” (Zvelebil, *Op.cit.*, p. 218).

The Siddhas poems are very simple and straightforward in some cases, whereas some are more philosophical and mystical in nature. Some poems give a simple meaning on the face; however, the true philosophical and mystical meanings are kept hidden in them. “In short, the Tamil Siddhas use a kind of secret language in which very often the highest is clothed in the form of lowest, the most sacred in the form of the most ordinary, the transcendent in

the form of the most earthly and deepest knowledge in the form of the most grotesque paradoxes. It was not only a language for the initiates but a kind of shock-therapy which had become necessary on account of the over-intellectualization of the religious and philosophical life of those times” (Ganapathy, *Op.cit.*, p. 168).

Siddha community was predominantly represented by non-Brahmins with a few exceptions. All the Siddhas were against the *mārga* tradition. All echoed their voice against Brahmins’ hegemony and the existence of caste system, superstitions, rituals *etc.* Tirumūlar was against any form of ritualistic worship (*TMM* 33, 978, 1631 and 1686). *Agasthiyar Jñānam* observes that if the mind is straight, it is unnecessary to utter *mantras* (*Agasthiyar Jñānam* 2: hymn 1). Similarly, going on pilgrimages, taking bath in sacred tanks and rivers and going to forest resorts are also condemned by Siddhas (*Ibid.*, p. 196).³ Śivavākkiyar condemns Brahmins as a symbol of the upholders of caste system and criticizes Brahminism vehemently in many of his hymns.⁴ He categorically says that the utterances of Vedas are as blabberings (hymn 33); spittings (hymns 36 and 37) and simple murmurings (hymn 480). He strongly felt that casteism is perpetuated through the theory of rebirth and the common man believes that those who do right actions in a birth are reborn in a higher caste in the next birth. In order to have a dig at casteism, Śivavākkiyar goes to the extent of denying rebirth (hymn 43). The denial of rebirth is just to show that caste is not determined by birth (*Ibid.*, p. 195). In a nutshell, the ethics of Siddhas has two aspects – one which is ancillary to realization and the other which flows out from realization. Two things are stressed as ethical preparation for self-realization. One is free from oneself from the limited ego or selfishness. Tirumūlar says that “One should not boast by saying my father, my mother”, *etc.* (*TMM* 1129). The second ethical preparation consists in developing desirelessness. Again, the mystic states that even the desire to be

one with God is to be eschewed (*TMM* 2615). He also utters that “there is no point in studying Vedānta, the method to attain self-realization, if one does not develop the attitude of desirelessness” (*TMM* 229). As put it by T.N. Ganapathy (*Ibid.*, p. 198): “After realization the Siddha does not withdraw himself from society, but works for the welfare of the people out of deep compassion. At this level ethical precepts flow out the realized being and they serve as guide-posts for others for better living. There is the well-known *ashṭa pushpāñjali* or the offering of flowers in the form of eight moral and spiritual qualities: *Ahimsa*, control of senses, compassion to all, forbearance, knowledge, penance, truth and sincere-feeling”. The Tamil Siddhas prefer this type of ethical *pūja* to the ritualistic *pūja*. Almost all Siddhas feel that equality can be attained only by *ahimsa* and so they advocate *ahimsa* as a basic ethical principle (*TMM* 197; *Bhadrāgiriyaṛ*, hymn 14). The only wisdom we can hope to acquire is the wisdom of humility. To Tirumūlar, the way to attain Godhead is to have a kind heart (*TMM* 273). Born out of this kind heart he advocates people to adopt what we call today the *Piḍi Aricit Tiṭṭam* (Providing one handful of rice for the sake of poor people (*TMM* 252).

Though Siddhas were appreciated for the aforesaid notions and attracted to public, hardly they were respected and regarded. Rather they were often ignored as mavericks and nomads; and condemned as eccentrics, mischievous and mad fellows. As a result, even their life and achievements were not duly recognized and recorded. It is a fact that there was no well-established interrelationship among the Siddhas, who appeared in different times at different places (mainly between A.D. 1000–1500). Scattered as they were, there was no forum or institution backed by people and appreciation available for their humanitarian concerns and its related activities. They appeared sometimes upon the earth, realized the true life, preached sincerely what they felt for the upliftment of everyone

and at last disappeared in the end mostly without any traceable history.

When this is the condition prevailed for Siddhas in Tamil Nadu, the socio-religious and political situation of Karnataka was not either different; rather, it was more disturbed than Tamil Nadu during the medieval period. Karnataka virtually became a battle-field during the 11th century A.D. in the hands of Karṇa, who ruled the Kalachūri principality. His successor, Bijjala the II, who came to power around A.D. 1130 had expanded the tiny principality into an empire by waging innumerable battles and ruled the country up to A.D. 1167. This was a turbulent time in which militant forces disrupted the political as well as the religious life of the land. It was an age of keen competition between the rival religions of the *kālāmukhas* and the *vaishṇavas*, vying with each other to capture the allegiance of the people. As a consequence of rivalry, a number of temples were constructed. Temples had been greatly enriched by donations of money and land from kings, viceroys, army commanders, *etc.* The *śūdras* were brainwashed for rendering manual services to the temples. Temples virtually became informal banks and power centers in the hands of Brahmins. The *mārga* tradition was in full swing, which exploited the innocence of common man. The *kālāmukhas* – a Śaiva sect gave importance to the Vedas, the *yajña* and *yoga* ceremonies and sacrificial rites. Another Śaiva sect, “the *kāpālikas* were exercising inhuman practices such as drinking liquor from cabooshes made of human skulls and inhibited sexual intercourse with women, all to propitiate their deity, Bhairava, a form of Śiva associated with death and graveyard” (Ishwaran 1992: 47). They also kept the so-called lowborn *śūdras* outside temples like their *vaishṇava* counterparts. The *śūdras* were denied the privilege of learning the wisdom of the *mārga* tradition and enjoying its literary excellence.

The institution of *varṇāśrama dharma* (Four castes and Four life-stages system) upheld the elitist domination of the *dvijas* (Twice born people i.e. Brahmins) over the *śūdras*. The *Dharma śāstras* in general and *Manusmṛiti* in particular, enunciated the rules and injunctions necessary to keep the *dvija* and the *śūdra* in their respective position in the social space – the former at the top and the latter at the bottom of the hierarchical scale.

Bijjaḷa the II, who ruled Karnataka for 37 years i.e. from A.D. 1130 to 1167, was very anxious to contribute materially to the establishment of *agrahāras*, to the performance of sacrificial rituals to the preservation of caste-based rights and privileges. When Karnataka was thus getting doomed in all respects, *Vīraśaivism* propagated by Basaveśvara (A.D. 1105–1167) emerged as the alternate socio-religious-cultural movement against the established Brahminical order of the day. “The philosophy of the Vīraśaivas is called the *Vīraśaiva Siddhānta* or the *Shaṭsthala-Siddhānta*, and is distinguished from the Śaiva Siddhānta.⁵ As in the Śaiva Siddhānta, the most authoritative books of the sect are the twenty-eight *Śaivāgamas*. In the available *Śaivāgamas*, the worship of Śiva either in the form of the *Linga* or of images consecrated in temples is enjoined. *Vīraśaivism* disapproves image-worship as strongly as possible, and maintains that the Supreme is to be worshipped in one’s own *Ishṭa-linga*, the *linga* obtained from the *guru* at the time of initiation, *dīksha* (Nandimath 1942: 11).

Basaveśvara, popularly known as Basava/Basavaṇṇa, was born to Brahmin parents in A.D. 1105. And he died in A.D. 1167. From the early childhood, he developed anti-brahminism and maintained it till his death. At the age of eight, he even refused to undergo the *upanayana* ceremony (wearing of sacred thread)⁶ which was radical, revolutionary and unimaginable in the context of 12th century. He grew stronger with all new ideas on socio-religious matters. On the persuasion by the king Bijjaḷa the II, he took charge as the

Bhaṇḍāri (Chancellor of the State Exchequer) in the year A.D. 1154 which he held till A.D. 1167.

During this period, he plunged into religious and social activities with serious thought and systematic approach. He worked with burning zeal to realize what he had visualized at *Kūḍala Sangama*. His great object was to build up an ideal society where all individuals must have equal opportunities for religious pursuit or spiritual development irrespective of their caste, creed, sex and vocation in life.

The gates of *Vīraśaivism* were thrown open to all without any barriers of caste, creed or sex. He established a socio-religious academy called *Anubhava Maṇṭapa* (Hall of God's Experience), which attracted hundreds of saints and spiritual aspirants from all over the country. His revolutionary message and mission created a sensation among the orthodox. They organized themselves to oppose him unsuccessfully, but in A.D. 1167 they had their wish fulfilled. Basava arranged the marriage of the daughter of Madhuvarasa who had formerly been a Brahmin with the son of Haralayya, who had formerly been an untouchable. The orthodox cited this incident as a case of *varṇa-saṅkara* (the admixture of *varṇas*) and evil against *dharma*. They raised a hue and cry. Bijjala yielded to the pressure of the vested interests. The innocent Haralayya and Madhuvarasa were mercilessly persecuted. They were chained to the legs of an elephant, which dragged them to their death.

This developed into a socio-political conflict on which disgusted Basava left Kalyāṇa forever and straight away went to Kūḍala Sangama where he lived for only a few days and died in A.D. 1167. Subsequently his political opponents probably killed the king Bijjala. But the blame was thrown upon the *śaraṇas* (the dedicated band of missionaries of *Vīraśaivism* or *Lingāyatism*). The other version is that *śaraṇas* became upset and a few left to Sangama where Basavaṇṇa already departed to. Some of them who

had lost all tolerance became revengeful. In the resulting violent collision, countless śaraṇas lost their lives. The few survivors left Kalyāṇa. After this holocaust, Bijjala gave up his kingship, crowned his son, Rāyamurāri Sovideva, and died in March A.D. 1168 (*Ibid.*).

The term *Lingāyat* derives from the fact that they have symbolized the cosmic force of Lord Śiva in a personal *linga*, which they wear on their chests. *Lingāyat* literally means a *linga*-wearer. Their cult is known as *Vīraśaivism* (Militant or Heroic Śaivism) by another term. Once they entered the Vīraśaiva order, Basava declared their *varṇas* and castes were automatically burnt, and a new life began. They were called śaraṇas - the disciples of God. To propagate their ideals and the ultimate goal, the śaraṇas used a variety of literary genre called *vacanas*. The *vacanas* are short prose lyrics, which were not written but recited by Basava and his Vīraśaivite colleagues.

Siddha sect and *Vīraśaiva Movement* emerged basically as socio-religious movements to reject the then existing *Bhakti* tradition/*mārga* tradition, functioning on Brahminical ideologies. The *Bhakti* tradition aimed at liberating the individual human being from the bondage of that empirical-material world, from the cycle of re-births, and from the curse of *karma*. It advocated the theory of illusion i.e. *māyāvād*. While Siddhas gave much importance to the body and accepted the existence of world and seriously preached the path of spiritualism to realize the God Śiva in the heart, whereas Vīraśaivism aimed at a socio-economic transformation that would bring about a new social order based on equality and mutuality. In its agenda, spiritual salvation was not that important but it was secular transformation. The first and the last goal of Vīraśaivism was nothing less than the liberation of the *śūdras*, the majority in the contemporary society, from the dominance of the powerful, ruling minority, so that they could stand up and assert their equality with the highest in the land.

Tirumūlar – considered as the father of Tamil Siddhar tradition (c. A.D. 700), exhorts devotees to renounce all attachments and turn the minds heavenward. He glorifies the potentialities of the human body and affirms the reality of life and world. He does not believe that the human body is evil in itself. He valued, “Heart as the sanctum sanctorum” and “the body as the temple of God”⁷ (*TMM* 1823). Śivavāḱkiyar – the most rebellion Siddha wonders: “Should Gods become stones, what can I do except laughing (at you people)” (*Śivavāḱkiyar* (*ŚVR*), hymn 121).⁸ “The Lord came and made a temple of my heart here, entering it in the same way in which fresh water gets into the tender coconut” (*ŚVR*, hymn 28),⁹ thus he explains the way how the God made him to get the experience of ‘Hisness’ in the heart.

Allama Prabhu – the mystic poet of *Vīraśaivism*, shares similar views and proclaims (*Vacana* 213).

While the body itself is a temple
 Why run after other temples?
 While life-breath itself is *linga*, why other *lingas*?
 Unspeaking, unhearing
 Lord *Guheśwara*, if you become stone, what I will be”?
 (Tr. K. Ishwaran)

Asking people to convert their body into a temple, Basava speaks:

The rich build temples to Śiva
 Lord what can I do, a poor man
 Regard my legs as pillars, my body as your temple
 My head the gold-washed cupola
 Hear me, Lord Kūḍala Sangama Deva
 What is static dies, what moves is deathless
 (*Basava Vacana*: 820), (Tr. K. Ishwaran)

Both Siddhar tradition and *Vīraśaivism* did not approve of polytheism or worship of several Gods. Tirumūlar plainly expresses his

view, “**There is One humanity and One God**”. Basavaṇṇa with more confidence says:

**God is but one, many his names
The faithful wife knows but one Lord**

The *Bhakti* tradition of medieval period aimed at marginal individual relief from the rigour of the caste society, never challenging its foundations. It accepted the authority of the Vedas as the voice of God. Its intention was not to collide with the Brahmin orthodoxy, but only to reinforce it through the palliative of mild reformism, even revivalism. All Siddhas and Vīraśaiva poets vehemently criticize the authority of the Vedas and the rites and rituals, which are formulated, and functioning on them. These seers sometimes used fiery language to repudiate the authority of Vedas and *āgamas*, the sanctity of temples and the value of worship in them.

The Vīraśaiva leader Basavaṇṇa like Siddhas was very critical of ritualistic ceremonies devoid of pure devotion. In the quest of realization, he emphasized, all that is needed is inner purity rather than visiting temples, worshipping idols, uttering *mantras*, dipping in ponds, and so on. He, therefore, questioned the attitude of people:

They dip as soon as they see water
They worshipfully go round any tree in sight
How can they who go after drainable water and withering tree
Know You, Lord Kūḍala Sangamadeva.
(*Vacana* 579), (Tr. K. Ishwaran)

Similarly, Śivavākkiyar (who seems to have lived in the same period of Basavaṇṇa) – the Siddha ‘pious’ rebellion in nature, rebukes idol worship and empty ritualism.

Why should you garland a stone god?
 And make rounds and rounds
 Around the planted stone
 All the time reciting *mantras*?
 How do you expect the stone to speak
 When God Himself is within you?¹⁰

He severely attacks:

What are temples? What are bathing tanks?
 Fools who worship in temples and tanks!
 Temples are in the mind; Tanks are in the mind¹¹

The dictum of Vīraśaivas and Tamil Siddhas is very clear that one should not, forgetting that God is omnipresent, seek him in stone, tree and running water. They saw the God from the point of view of a man of wisdom (*Jñāni*). They felt that by visualising God in an image, the devotee limits the Absolute who is formless and infinite to a form. By undertaking pilgrimages man limits the Almighty who is everywhere to a particular place. In their vision, **the Supreme Being is the beyond of beyond**. They thus articulated their position from the perspective of a *jñāni* who reveals in union of transcending the duality of self and Supreme Being. Thus becoming one with the God, they see no differences with whomsoever. All are equal and one and the same before the Supreme Being. That is why these pious souls ridiculed people whosoever practices the *Manu dharma* system in life.

In the similar line of Vīraśaivas, Śivavākkiyar vehemently condemned: “what is caste? What kind of character it is, preaching the caste difference.”¹² He firmly believed that no difference could be found between two human beings. He, in his own style, poses a practical question to the religious orthodox:

What does it mean – a *paraiya* woman?
 What is it - a *brahmin* women?

Is there any difference in them?
 In flesh, skin or bones?
 What is the difference if you sleep
 with a *paraiya* or a *brahmin* woman?¹³

“We will set fire to the disgusting caste system”,¹⁴ thus roars Pāmbāṭṭicittar. He further adds: “Four *vedas*, *śāstras* of six kind, several *tantras*, many *purāṇas* and *āgamas* and a variety of different works, are all rubbish.”¹⁵ This kind of poems is very common in Siddha Literature, which speaks out the anti-Vedic stand of Siddhas in toto.

Rejecting the Vedic religion as its core agenda, Vīraśaivism also strongly reacted through its *vacanas*. Basavaṇṇa – the prophet of Vīraśaivism, vehemently deprecated the whole Vedic system and protested against the selfish practices and exploitations that were prevalent in the guise of *catur varṇāśrama*. He illumined more rationally the true nature of religion, in the following *vacana*:

The man who slays is a *paraiah*
 The man who eats the carrion is a low-caste person
 Where is the caste here-where?
 Our Kūḍala Sangama’s *sharaṇa*
 Who loves all living things
 He is the well-born one.
 (Tr. H. Tipperudra swamy)

It is evident that according to Basava’s judgement, a man’s worth should be judged not by his birth but by his thoughts and deeds, by his conduct and character. (We should know that all Siddhas were very simple in nature, down to the earth in behaviour and modest to the core in action like Basava). A Siddha namely Bhadragiriyar (hymn 29) wishes to do service as a servant to the servant of Śiva). Further, Basava illustrates his affirmation with a score of examples of sages and seers and showed that caste by birth could never be the criterion for the worth of a man:

Vyasa is a fisherman's son,
 Mārkaṇḍeya of an out caste born,
 Maṇḍōdari, the daughter of a frog;
 O, look not for caste: in caste,
 What were you in the past?
 Indeed, Agastya was fowler,
 Dūrvāsa, a maker of shoes,
 Kāśyapa, a blacksmith,
 The sage, Kauṇḍinya by name
 Was, as the three worlds know,
 A barber-Mark ye all, the words
 Of our Kūḍala Sangama run;
 What matters if one is lowly born?
 Only a Śiva bhakta is well born.
 (Tr. H. Tipperudra swamy)

Basava was not a mere preacher of Vīraśaivism; he was an ardent follower of his principles. The very untouchables whom the high born kept at a distance – and a mere glance at whom had to be followed by a purificatory bath, were enlisted as members in *Anubhava Maṇṭapa* – the socio-religious academy set up by Basavaṇṇa. He gave them equal status both in religion and society. He speaks:

Shall I call Śiriyāla a man of trade?
 And Macchayya, a washerman?
 Call Kākkayya, a tanner and
 Cennayya a cobbler?
 And if I call myself
 A Brahmin, will not
 Kūḍala Sangama just laugh at me?
 (Tr. H. Tipperudra swamy)

This proclaims perfect religious equality to all who deserved not by virtue of their birth but by their worth.

In the Vedic religion, Fire has been considered as one of the *pañca bhūtas* (Five elements) and given a central place in its rites and rituals. It has been equaled as the purifier. However, either Siddhas or Vīraśaivites altogether did not accept this notion. In a categorical way, Basavaṇṇa, in one of his *vacanas*, laughs at the Brahminical ideology.

In a Brahmin house
Where they feed the fire
as a god
When the fire goes wild
And burns the house
They splash on it
The water of the gutter
And the dust of the street,
beat their breasts
and call the crowd.
These men then forget their worship
and scold their fire,
O Lord of the meeting rivers!
(Tr. A.K. Ramanujan)

Both Siddhas and Vīraśaivites also out rightly rejected the other ideologies and doctrines of Vedic religion such as *purushārthas*, the *āśrama* principle, the notion of *karma*, the idea of rebirth and salvation, *etc.* Like *Bhakti* tradition, in Vīraśaivism, there was institutional infrastructure functioned for achieving the goal, which was absent in the case of Siddha's ideology. In contrast to *Bhakti* tradition, which emphasizes passionate devotion to God, to the *Ishta Devata*, the Siddhas emphasize knowledge, *yoga* practice, moral behaviour, right conduct and character. Since they were moving always as spiritual beings, there was no scope for any mediator and mediating institution. They firmly believed: "If the mind is in the right disposition, it is unnecessary to utter the *mandiram*"¹⁶.

Vīraśaivism as a new religion founded the following three key socio-religious institutions to carryout its ideology of reformation and social harmony.

1. **Anubhava Maṇṭapa** (Hall of God's Experience)
2. **Dasoha** (Community Dining, Kitchen and Service)
3. **Kāyaka** (Dignity of Labour)

The *Anubhava Maṇṭapa* served as the ideal hall for all sorts of people, irrespective of their caste, creed and sex to get equal treatment and experience of God. Women were also given equal status sometimes highly regarded as noble souls like Akka Mahādevi, Āydakki Lakkamma, Moligeya Mahādevi, Nīlamma, Nāgammā, *etc.* In the ideology of Siddhas, there is no place for women. Generally women were considered as one of the evils, which punish a man with lot of troubles. Siddhas like Paṭṭiṇattār, Bhadrāgiriyaṛ, *etc.* in many of their poems, severely condemn women, because of their personal sufferings at the hands of some women. “The ghost of *māya* came in the disguise of women; caught hold of me; frightened by eyes, charmed by breasts, pushed me into the sore of pit snatched away my wisdom, only to forget you, O Lord Kacci Ēgambā!”,¹⁷ thus the siddha Paṭṭiṇattār categorically blames women. Bhadrāgiriyaṛ very sincerely worries that when he would be free from women folk, who charm him by their eyes, hands and legs to forget everything (hymn 9). A conviction of Siddhas was that by the physical contact of woman, man loses his vital energy with the emission of sperm. “The sex act, according to the Siddhas, is a not a profane act, for, it must never terminate in the emission of sperm. ... If a *yogin* attains the state of controlling the emission of semen during the sexual intercourse, he conquers *historicity* (Ganapathy, *Op.cit.*, p. 178). That conqueror obtains ‘the rainbow body’ which vanishes at will like a rainbow, leaving no trace behind (*Ibid.*, p. 128). Naturally, Siddhas, the spiritual beings

considered women as real culprits in preventing men in obtaining the *siddha deha* (Subtle body like rainbow) and thereby belittle them ever to suffer in the world. But Vīraśaivites never looked down and belittled women in whatsoever manner as they are householders respecting their counterparts equally by all possible means.

Vīraśaivism, through *dasoha* system sincerely entertained community Kitchen, dining and service. It served the powerful institutional infrastructure, which attracted a lot of low caste non-Brahmins into Vīraśaivism and made their new religion a serious threat to the then existing Bhakti religion. Whosoever embraced Vīraśaivism, indeed felt harmony and happiness, when their real problem was taken care of by the *dasoha* system. According to Basava, *dasoha* means hard work for one's livelihood and for the maintenance of society. For the lack of evidence, it seems, the kind of *dasoha* system was not operating in the Siddhas ideology. It is to be remembered that Siddhas did not form a forum to interact with their fellow people, as they were moving from place to place quite often and mostly living on alms.

The institutional system of *kāyaka* of Vīraśaivism was also innovative one, in which occupational equality was maintained. People, in *varṇāśrama dharma* were not allowed to choose their occupation according to their wish. Caste played the role to determine one's occupation and accordingly he/she was being treated in the society.

Whereas the *śaraṇas* of Vīraśaivism, hailing from different parts of the land freely chose their occupations and brought about occupational nobility, Basava and his *śaraṇa* colleagues proclaimed that one's chosen occupation is *kāyaka* and *kāyaka* is *kailāsa*. This striking feature was also could not be found in Siddha tradition and philosophy. Siddhas as *yogīs* – tired of worldly life – did not have any idea on this line. Their tradition of worship was

basically spiritual but not social at any level. But the *śaraṇas* of Vīraśaivism did not abandon their domestic obligations and commitments in order to seek their God and their liberation. Both men and women, husbands and wives joined together in pursuing the establishment of Śiva's society. Though there was difference in pursuing the God Śiva between these two cults, still Siddhas were also carrying similar reformative views of Vīraśaivites on social issues. As a unique philosophy, Vīraśaivism was articulating the ideal of universal humanity, founded on the principle of the equality of all human beings and counter posed uncompromisingly to the antecedent Brahmin order stratified along caste, occupational and sex distinctions.

As we are aware, every religion, in principle, preaches for humanity and compassion even to non-human beings. But, it is the fanatics, who make religion as a closed one. Vedic religion, as it claims, is highly concerned for the smooth survival of the universe, however, indulged in animal sacrifices right from the beginning. But in Vīraśaivism, compassion – the concern for all beings, has found a unique place, which is absent in the case of Siddha's tradition. "What kind of religion it can be, without compassion"?, thus asks Basavaṇṇa. In one of his *vacanas*, he strikes the note of piety and compassion. He here addresses the goat, which is being taken to the sacrificial fire:

The sacrificial lamb brought for the festival
 ate up the green leaf brought for the decorations.
 Not knowing a thing about the kill,
 it wants only to fill its belly:
 born that day, to die that day.
 But tell me:
 did the killers survive?
 O lord of the meeting rivers"?
 (Tr. A.K. Ramanujan)

This peculiar feeling of compassion and other systems (discussed above) of Basavaṇṇa's Vīraśaivism (which were absent in the case of earlier Siddhas) could be found fully in Rāmalinga swāmi's movement and philosophy. Rāmalinga swāmi (1823–1874), considered as the last Siddha, founded *Samarasa Śuddha Sanmārga Sattiya Sangam* (Society for Pure Truth in Universal Selfhood) in the year 1865 in Tamil Nadu. Probably, Basavaṇṇa might be a model for him to establish institutions such as *Sattiya Dharuma Sālai* (Universal Hall of Philanthropy, 1867), *Sanmārga Bhodini* (School for the Fellowship, 1867), and *Sattiya Jñāna Sabai* (Hall of True Knowledge, 1872) in his endeavour for social harmony (It needs to be studied separately). Rāmalinga swāmi also echoed the similar revolting voice against the Vedic religion, and its *varṇāśrama dharma* practice, carrying out rites and rituals involving animals for sacrifice. With all the innovative systems and approach, when Basavaṇṇa sincerely formulated and propagated the Vīraśaivism, really they paid their dividends. Thus, Vīraśaivism emerged as the socio-religious movement in Karnataka in the 12th century A.D. and still maintains its popularity even today.

Since, Siddhas lived at different places in different times and in the absence of thorough interaction among them (still it needs to be explored), it appears, no concrete step/ideology was formulated and propagated. They voiced their protest at individual levels, having a few or no supporters who dared to take their mission and fight for the cause. So, obviously, Siddha tradition was not felt as a serious threat to the then existing *Bhakti* cult. Though Siddhas were pioneers in challenging the religious orthodoxy, till recently their poems/songs remained unpublished. Their genuine spiritual greatness and even their scientific experiments were treated as black magic.

It is to be remembered that almost all the Siddhas (with one or two exceptions), were hailing from the so-called *Śūdra* community and did not have much respect in their society. So the so-called

religious pundits branded them as disciples of devil. Through their personal experience, after facing all sorts of problems in life, Siddhas realized the God and understood themselves. They believed in the justice of God and in the goodness of man. To them every man carries heaven in his heart: every man can realize the God, if he pursues the spiritual path. They were optimists like Vīraśaivites but their approach was different, perhaps that could be a reason for their failure. But Vīraśaivism succeeded in its attempt and consolidated its position in Karnataka. Vīraśaivism was seriously perceived as the way of life with utmost sincerity, not only by ordinary people but also by the powerful *śaraṇa* Basavaṇṇa and his associates, who happened to be born in highly respected families. Though the *śaraṇas* were from all castes and classes, spiritually it was led by none other than the great mystic scholar Allama Prabhu and supported by Akka Mahādevi, Nīlamma, Nāgamma, and Madhuvarasa, *etc.*

Some of these leading lights originally belong to Brahmin community by the virtue of their birth. Besides his Brahmin's lineage, Basavaṇṇa was also holding the powerful post i.e. *Bhaṇḍāri* in the Bijjala's kingdom. So wisdom and power, which were naturally accessible to Vīraśaivism, made it a success to create the *Lingāyatism* in Karnataka. This unity of wisdom and power remained as a characteristic feature of Vīraśaivism's leadership and with a strong support from the monastic order (*Muṭṭs*) during the subsequent centuries. This proved to be a strong hold in the development of Vīraśaivism in Karnataka.

The Brahmins joining hands together with the non-Brahmins in questioning the Brahmanism and bringing a new socio-religious order could be considered as one of the characteristic features of Vīraśaivism. Siddhas, on the other hand, lacked this Brahminical base, the power structure and the monastic order in successfully converting its ideas into a socio-religious movement. In other

words, Siddha tradition, founded and propagated mostly by *śūdras*, lacking of a clear goal, having no forum and power access and not gaining support of masses, practically could not survive except for living theoretically in the history of medieval Tamil literature.

Thus, we find a lot of parallelism between the views of Siddhas and Vīraśaivites. In both the cases, ultimately humanity is more important one than the religion. Siddhas as such were householders turned mystics whereas Vīraśaivites were remaining as ‘be-all and end-all’ as householders. There is a close relation between the Siddhas and the Vīraśaivites in that for both anything that has a semblance of an external authority is to be rejected. The former one represents ‘rebels’ inside the theistic fold whereas the latter one represents ‘the pious rebels’ outside the theistic fold. Both have influenced the later orthodox saints and seers also. With all probity, we could say that Vīraśaivism was a movement of culminating protest, reform, and revolutionary notions within the established framework, aiming, not to displace it but to modify it marginally. Not only it had the aims of such a movement but also its operational methods derive from the existing framework.

As put it by Ishwaran (*Ibid.*, p. 200): “Seen from the perspective of a populist community, Lingāyatism emerges as a revolutionary movement, transcending the categories of protest and reformism. It represents a radical rupture with the traditional structures, whether ideological or institutional. While mounting an attack on the Brahman tradition, Lingāyatism did not hesitate to use tactically some of the idiom, style and symbolism of the *bhakti* which worked within the tradition. Thus, a certain necessary ambivalence was generated by Lingāyatism in its relation to the *bhakti* religion – a rejection of its ideological content and a partial employment of its operational modalities and style. On the one hand, it rejected the dominant *mārga* tradition, and, on the other, it also rejected the alternative of the *deśi* tradition.”

The movement was a total one, comprising religious sentiments, socio-economic and cultural dimensions. But, Siddha cult (basically not a movement in real sense) was a tradition of mystics who protested and suggested theistic reforms (not revolutionary) arguably not within the established framework. No doubt, they were rebels but worked outside the established religious framework. However, in both the Bhakti cults, religion is not a creed or a code but an insight into, and a profound encounter with, the Supreme Reality.

In their religious and spiritual pursuits, while Vīraśaivism considered Śiva as its only Supreme Being and sticking to it even today, whereas almost all Siddhas though upheld Śiva as its Supreme deity at some point of time in their lives (may be in the beginning of their mystic journey), but soon most of them departed from it and finally ended with altogether different 'Ultimate Reality' i.e. a nameless and formless Spiritual Being (sometimes they addressed the Supreme Spiritual Being as *Śivam* ('Spiritually Enlightened Being'), as they were deeply embedded with spirituality. In this sense, the cult of Siddhas crosses all barriers such as nation, religion, caste, community, gender, and so on, that only to see the benefits of their spiritual wisdom reaching out to the welfare of entire humanity.

Both Vīraśaivism and Siddha cult share similar spiritual and social concerns, but there is a remarkable difference in their mottoes. The former one is a popular people's movement (still having its hold in Karnataka) mainly concerned for the egalitarian society in which every one is equal and every occupation is worshipful whereas the latter one was a cult of few mystics mainly concerned for the spiritual development of people, though it represented diverse ideas and opinions on socio-religious sentiments. The Siddha cult – a force for few centuries operated at spiritual level, is degenerated and disappeared one even from the

society of Tamil people where it had originally emerged. But, Vīraśaivism is a living sect of Śaiva religion which is still dominant in Kannada country, that has sectarian in outlook and served with related perspectives.

Notes

- * Revised version of the paper published in *Dravidian Studies* (A Quarterly Research Journal), Vol. I, No. 3, V. Gopala Krishna (Ed.), Dravidian University, Kuppam – 517 425, Andhra Pradesh, 2003. My sincere thanks to the authorities of Dravidian University who considered it for publication.
1. Foreword (page no. ix) given by R. Balasubramanian to the book titled *The Philosophy of the Tamil Siddhas* written by Dr. T.N. Ganapathy, which was first published by Indian Council of Philosophical Research, New Delhi in the year 1993.
 2. **Specific Powers are of Eight Kinds:**
 - (a) *Aṇima* (Skt. *Aṇiman*) – “Shrinking”, the faculty of reducing one-self to the size of an atom;
 - (b) *Makima* (Skt. *Mahiman*) – “Illimitability”, the power of increasing one’s size without limit;
 - (c) *Lakima* (Skt. *Lahiman*) – “Lightness”;
 - (d) *Piratti* (Skt. *Kāmāvasāyitva*) – “Fulfillment of desires”, the power of attaining everything desired;
 - (e) *Pirakamiyam* (Skt. *Prākāmya*) – “Irresistible will”, the power to overcome natural objects and go anywhere;
 - (f) *Icattuvam* (Skt. *Īśitva*) – “Supremacy”, dominion over animate and inanimate nature;
 - (g) *Vacittuvam* (Skt. *Vaśitva*) – “Dominion over the elements”, the power of changing the course of nature and assuming any form;
 - (h) *Karima* (Skt. *Gariman*) – “Weight”, the power of rendering the body immaterial and able to penetrate matter.
- (See for more details: Kamil Zvelebil, *The Smile of Murugan*, p. 225).

3. Refer: *Śivavākkīyar* (ŚVR), hymns 29, 63, 209 and 494; *Paṭṭi-ṇatttār*, *Pūraṇamālai* 21; *Agappēyc cīttar*, hymn 50; *Kaḍuveḷic cīttar*, hymn 15; *Karuvūrār*, hymn 22; *Kāgapuṣuṇḍar*, hymn 15).
4. *Śivavākkīyar*, hymns 10, 32, 37, 42, 121, 122, 126, 212, 275, 363, 459 and 479.
5. **Shaṣṭhala Siddhānta (The Six-Stage Doctrine):**
 - I. In the *Bhakta* stage – A *lingāyat* gains a deep understanding of the concepts of God, His creation, and the nature of the *śaraṇa* world and life.
 - II. In the *Maheśvara* stage – He (*lingāyat*) learns to perform devoted action in order to serve the *śaraṇa* society with a pure heart; and he also learns to shun what belongs to others. He tries hard to gain his God's grace.
 - III. In the *Prasādi* stage – By his understanding of the *Ishta Linga* and his love of society, he is able to get rid of parochial feelings, and to see the whole world as pervaded by Śiva. He sees all persons in this world as deeply immersed in the service of God. This faith enables him to see whatever he remembers, whatever he does, and whatever he gives, as meant for God's dedication. He finds himself deeply absorbed in society, and hence he experiences his body as grace.
 - IV. In the *Prāṇalingi* stage – He successfully internalizes the *lingāyat* social and religious values, and attains self-fulfillment. At this point, he regards God and society as his life-breath. He experiences divinity in society and also finds it burning in his heart.
 - V. In the *Śaraṇa* stage – devotion turns into blissful experience. In the purity of his body he enjoys the bliss of experiencing divine presence, and in social praxis he experiences the bliss of authentic experience. Basava has called the presence of the *śaraṇa* in this stage as *kailāsa* (*Basava Vacana* 827). The society to which the *śaraṇa* now belongs is one liberated from caste hierarchy (*Basava Vacana* 868).
 - IV. In the last stage *Aikya* – The *lingāyat* is able to see identity between God and society. Himself becoming one with them, he views them with equal commitment. In this stage, unable to distinguish God and society, he does not know whom to worship,

follow, and with whom to achieve communion. In a profound sense, the worship he performs in this stage is worship of society. He is now beyond meditation, bead-counting, mental concentration and solitude. His body, dedicated to the service of the community fashioned by God, has now attained ripeness. It is a ripe fruit which has surrendered to the *linga* and been accepted by it, and thus attained worthiness. It matters little whether this fruit still hangs from the tree of devotion or has fallen to the ground. And beyond? There is no sound, no word, nothing but silence, nothing but nothing, a vast emptiness.

(K. Ishwaran, *Speaking of Basava*, pp. 177–78), (Also see for more details: S.C. Nandimath, *A Handbook of Vīraśaivism*, The Literary Committee of L.E. Association, Dharwar, 1942, pp. 163–181).

6. *Upanayana*: Every Brahmin boy must undergo a sanctifying ritual (*Samskāra*) called ‘*upanayana*’. The rite suggests that the young boy is taken to a teacher and given over to him for proper instruction and education. The child used to be initiated into reading and writing at the age of five.
7. *uḷḷam peruṅkōyil ūṇuḍambu ālayam* (TMM, hymn 1823)
8. *dēvar kallum āvarō? cirippadaṇṇi eṇceyvēṇ?* (ŚVR, hymn 121)
9. *ceyya teṅgilē ḷaṇṇir cērnda kāraṇaṅgalpōl*
aiyaṇvandiṇṅu eṇṇuḷḷam pugundu kōyil koṇḍaṇṇaṇ (Ibid., 28)
10. *naṭṭa kallait teyvam eṇru nāluputpam cāttiye*
cuṟrivandu muṇamuṇeṇru collum mandiram ēdaḍā?
naṭṭa kallum pēcumō nādaṇṇuḷ irukkaiyil? (Ibid., 481)
11. *kōyilāvadē daḍā? kulangaḷ āvadē daḍā?*
kōyilum kulaṅgaḷum kumbiḍum kulāmarē
kōyilum maṇattuḷē kulaṅgaḷum maṇattuḷē (Ibid., 30)
12. *cādiāvadē daḍā?*
cādiabēdam ōdugiṇra taṇmai eṇṇa taṇmaiye? (Ibid., 42)
13. *paraicci āvadēdaḍā paṇattiyāva dēdaḍā?*
iraicci tōlelum biṇum ilakka miṭṭirukkudō?
paraicci bōgamvēradō paṇatti bōgamvēradō? (Ibid., 35)
14. *cāḍip piriviṇḷilē tīyai mūṭṭuvōm* (Pāmbātticcittar, hymn 123)
15. *cadurvēdam aṟuvagaic cāttirampala*
tandiram purāṇangalaic cārrum āgamam
vidamvida māṇavāṇa vēru nūlgaḷum
vīṇāṇa nūlgaḷē eṇrāḍu pāmbē (Ibid., 98)

16. *maṇṇamadu cemmai yāṇāl mandiram cebikka vēṇḍā*
(Agattiyar, hymn 1).
17. *peṇṇāgi vandadoru māyappicācam piḍittēṇṇaik*
kaṇṇāl veruṭṭi mulaiyāl mayakkik kaḍitaḍattup
puṇṇām kuḷiyiḍaittalli eṇbōdapporuḷ parikka
eṇṇādu uṇaimarandēṇ iṇaivā! kacci ēgambaṇē!
(Paṭṭiṇattār, hymn 23).

Chapter – 4

Basaveśvara and Rāmalinga swāmi: More than Just Mystics

Prophets are born. They are not made. From birth, their behaviour, inclinations, tendencies, and predilections are out of the ordinary kind. Yet, they live in the world along with others sharing their joys and sorrows. They get into married life and beget children. With all this, their outlook on life, ideals which they cherish and activities they indulge in, have an individualistic stamp but are unworldly. Quite often, they are treated as misfits by the opportunists, if not ostracized. Neither the worldly ills, which they have to face with fortitude, deter them from working for their goals nor the trials and tribulations, thrust upon them by circumstances, upset their composure. Experiences, which they had in previous births' mould their idiosyncrasies and help in developing them to perfection.*

- Pon. Sourirajan

Essentially, all Religions, as we believe, at some point of time and at different places, did evolve in the quest for uniting the mankind through compassion as well as regulating its energy towards the realization of 'Self' and 'God' for the 'Ultimate Bliss'. But history recorded to the horror countless attacks and fights arose out of fanaticism and subsequent heavy loss of human lives throughout the world. Then, can we blame the religions as anti-people institutions? No. Not at all! Religions are like vehicles

of different makings that have been originally conceived, designed and manufactured by different skillful Mechanical Engineers. Having marketed by different entrepreneurs, the vehicles have been driven by innumerable drivers by turn continuously for ages to the maximum distance possible. As a matter of fact, no vehicle is free from flaws. So at a later period, when these age-old vehicles go into the hands of intoxicated, ill-blooded and ill-natured drivers, instead of lifting the people up-ward, they get crashed against something and subsequently crush the people in the accident just to the unmindful of rash and negligent driving (Read here: 'vehicles of different makings' as 'the religions of different philosophies'; 'mechanical engineers' as 'the prophets'; 'entrepreneurs' as 'ascetics'; 'drivers' as 'the so-called spiritual leaders' who preach at the later periods).

Whenever the humanity experiences the severe blow and threat to its existence, there appears a savior to rescue it from the destruction and lead in the pathway of God for the 'Ultimate Bliss' *i.e.* 'Salvation'. Only at long intervals, there arise in the world rare personalities, who with the example of their lives and teachings guide erring humanity to nobler paths. The light, shed by these luminaries, shines like a beacon light on a dark and disordered world. The message of these pious souls is for the whole of the humanity and not for any particular community or country. It is the appearance of these bearers of divine light, which gives a meaning to common humdrum lives of men and women.

Basavaṇṇa of Karnataka of 12th century and Rāmalinga swāmi of Tamil Nadu of 19th century belonged to 'this exalted band of supermen of supreme wisdom and universal love'. In comparing these two rare spirits and in trying to understand the essentials of their teachings, we have to take note of the vastly different ages and surroundings in which they lived and worked. Though they lived in different regions of South India at different ages with the different

socio-political set ups, we find lot of common features between them to our surprise. The twelfth century witnessed an unprecedented revolution in the social life of Karnataka, and it was Basavaṇṇa (A.D. 1105–1167), who was the dynamic center of *Vīraśaivism* – the great revolution that brought a new awakening in the life of the common people. He was a mystic evoking several concepts of god from the Śaiva saints of Tamil Nadu in general and Tirunāvukkarasar and Māṇikkavāṣagar in particular. Before the advent of Basavaṇṇa, the life of the common people was nothing but misery. Religion was the monopoly of a class. The common people groaned under the dark shadow of religious fear created by the class. It was Basavaṇṇa who strongly revolted against the unjust and evil deeds done in the name of religion, and who vowed to bestow on the common people the right knowledge. Basavaṇṇa, assisted by a number of fellow idealists, started a gigantic social upheaval. Before Basavaṇṇa, never was there such a revolution in Karnataka, why, in a sense, in the whole of India that took place on such a large scale and with such great speed. The two creeds, Jainism and Buddhism which had similarly revolted against the evil exploitation of the common people by Brahmanism and had struggled to give to the common people the right religion, had broken away from the land of India. Basavaṇṇa kept himself within the bounds of Hinduism and fought against the evils of Brahmanism. He, thus, uplifted masses and secured for them a place of honour in society. Probably, Basavaṇṇa was a pioneer who tried to establish fraternity and equality, not only in Karnataka but also in the whole of India.

The conditions of society that formed the background for the rise of Basavaṇṇa in the 12th century were also to be found in the 19th century in the whole of India. Indians, groaning under the tyranny of the British rule, had lost their sense of individuality. Hinduism had degenerated into foolish superstition. The Christian

missionaries who were under the patronage of the ruling class began to preach and propagate Christianity among the masses. By establishing social institutions like schools, hospitals, orphanages, *etc.* the Christianity attracted lakhs and lakhs of people particularly the weaker sections of the society. With no worthy men to pump the fresh blood to the existing Hinduism in Tamil Nadu and reviving it with the social fraternity of Christianity, Rāmalinga swāmi (1823–1874) appeared on the scene and showed the path of new faith. For the first time in the history of Tamil Nadu, the new faith preached a new kind of religion of universal brotherhood transcending the barriers of caste, creed, profession, sex, *etc.* The central passion of the new movement was compassion to all living creatures and it became the first and foremost significant movement for ‘Pro-Animalism’, or ‘Pure Vegetarianism’ in Tamil Nadu. Therefore, Rāmalinga swāmi was rightly addressed as **Vaḷḷalār** (Philanthropist) by his followers, since he showed the real concern and worries over the killing of animals and birds in the name of religion and stood for their protection and their right for existing in the world.

Basava (people addressed him as Basavaṇṇa and Basaveśvara out of more affection and much respect respectively) and Rāmalinga swāmi were both rare personalities who wished to bring the kingdom of heaven upon earth. They were mighty leaders of socio-religious movements, *viz.* **Vīraśaiva Movement** (Militant or Heroic Śaivism) of Karnataka and **Vaḷḷalār Movement** (Movement of Philanthropist) of Tamil Nadu respectively. They were neither stain-glass window saints, nor fanatical reformers. Both were men of sturdy faith (God intoxicated) in one God and passionate convictions. It was Lord Śiva in the case of the former and ‘the Grand Grace Light’ in the case of the latter. Above all, they were human beings and truly concerned for man’s spiritual support in the world of ‘here and now’ and of ‘salvation’ of his soul in the here-

after. Their object was the moral and spiritual regeneration of each individual as well as the economic and material welfare of the people. Before the advent of Basavaṇṇa, humanity was pining for a message, which would be unequivocal and full of hope as to the destiny of man. Such had been the case with regard to Rāmalinga swāmi.

There is no authentic biography of Basavaṇṇa. Good many myths and legends have grown in his name. But, from his sayings, which are called *Vacanas* (Short prose lyrics) and from mythological poems in Kannada dealing with his life and work, we can construct a fairly plausible account of the events in his life. We have, on the contrary, a large volume of literature concerning the life and teachings of Rāmalinga swāmi. He himself has revealed the inner workings of his mind and the various vicissitudes and problems of his life in his *Tiru-Aruḷ-Pā* (Holy Grace Song) and his other prose works. We thus get fairly authentic details regarding his life.

Socio-religious situation of Karnataka in the 11th century was virtually very pathetic and turbulent (Please refer to the previous chapter for details of socio-religious situation of 11th and 12th century Karnataka).

Brief Life History of Basaveśvara and Rāmalinga swāmi

It is generally believed that Basavaṇṇa was born in A.D. 1105 in a Śaivite Brahmin family of Bāgēvāḍi, Bijāpur District of Mysore State. It is said that he was opposed to ritualism as practiced in his family and he even refused to undergo the *upanayana* ceremony¹ (Wearing of sacred thread). Disgusted with his family members, later on he left home in protest to Kappaḍi only to meet his *guru* Jatha Vedamuni. Then he embraced *Vīraśaivism* and entered the court of King Bijjaḷa of Kalyāṇa, where by his hard work and

administrative skill he rose from position of *gaṇaka* (Accountant) to become the Minister of the State. He tried to bring in revolutionary changes not only in the administration but also in religious and social fields for which the time was not ripe. His great object was to build up an ideal society where all individuals would have equal opportunities for religious pursuit. The gates of Vīraśaivism were thrown open to all without any barriers of caste, creed or sex (Please refer to the previous chapter for the details of Basaveśvara's mission and message, propagation and disillusionment and subsequent failure at the end of his career.).

The sad events that had taken place at the last phase of life and struggling for spiritual perfection of Basavaṇṇa could be found also in the life of Rāmalingar, though he lived seven centuries later at a different region of South India. He was born on 5th October 1823, in Marudūr – a village near Chidambaram, in Tamil Nadu as the fifth child of his family. His parents Rāmayya Piḷḷai and Chinṇammai of Śaiva faith belonging to the *Karuṇīgar* community, whose hereditary profession was Village Accountant. Rāmalingar lost his parents at the very young age. He was taken care of by his elder brother Sabhāpati and Pārvati – the wife of the latter. She protected him as her own son and set him in the right direction when he was a mischievous boy. He learnt things including education himself and became self-master. He got married to Dhaṇammāl, the daughter of his own elder sister, on the compulsion of the family people and friends. However, he left her virgin forever, looking for spiritual life. He was fully engaged in leading an austere life for the sake of spiritual bliss.

At his early period of spiritual journey, he followed the tradition of the Bhakti Movement and worshipped Lord Murugaṇ of Tiruttani (located at the northern border of Tamil Nadu near Chennai) in the beginning and later only to think of Lord Śiva of Tiruvorriyūr of Chennai. But soon he became more matured and a

realized ascetic who finally went on to propagate the new order of religion under the banner of **Vaḷḷalār Movement** (The Movement of Philanthropist) for the universal brotherhood. He worked hard for the above-said common religion of faith called **Samarasa Sanmārgam** (Society for Universal Selfhood) under which all people, irrespective of caste, creed and sex could take shelter and enjoy the divine bliss called **Arul-Perum-Jōthi** (the Grace Grand Light). Like Vīraśaivism, in the Vaḷḷalār Movement also women were given equal importance to pursue the religion at their will and strength.

In the similar way of Basavaṇṇa, Rāmalinga swāmi too questioned the dominance of Vedic ritualism and *Varṇāśrama Dharma* with the extraordinary mass support of higher-class people of Tamil Nadu except orthodox Brahmins. Just to uplift the common man socially as well as religiously like Basavaṇṇa, Rāmalinga swāmi established the following institutions with the zeal and vision. They were: **Samarasa Śuddha Sanmārga Sattiya Sangam** (Society for Pure Truth in Universal Selfhood, 1865), **Sattiya Dharuma Sālai** (True Boarding House/Feeding House, May 23, 1867), **Sattiya Jñāna Sabai** (Hall of True Knowledge, 1872), **Sanmārga Bhodini** (School for the Fellowship, 1872).

The sweeping popularity of his new movement was felt at that time as the real danger to the existing Hindu Śaiva religion. The orthodox Śaivites like Ārumuga Nāvalar (1823–1879) challenged Rāmalinga swāmi in all possible means. He even took the mystic to a court on the title of the book of holy songs i.e. **Tiru-Aruḷ-Pā** (TAP). Ārumuga Nāvalar – a hard core Śaivite of *Mudaliyār* community felt irritated over the use of the name **Tiru-Aruḷ-Pā** to Rāmalingar's book. As he was prejudiced against Rāmalinga swāmi, Ārumuga Nāvalar contended that the word '**Tiru**' (Holy/Sacred) should be restricted only to the great original poetic works of Śaiva saints like Tirujñānasambandar, Tirunāvukkarasar, Sunda-

rar, Māṇikkavāṣagar, *etc.* and could not be applied to the works of saints like Rāmalinga swāmi. He seriously felt that the *Vaḷḷalār Movement* on the one hand was damaging the then existing Hindu religion and on the other hand encouraging the foreign religions particularly Christianity to expand their base in Tamil Nadu. So he vehemently criticized the Rāmalinga swāmi's movement and prejudicially described the latter's book of holy songs *i.e.* *Aruṭpā* (Holy Songs of Grace) as *Maruṭpā* (Songs of Darkness). This sort of predicaments and other failures led Rāmalinga swāmi finally to disillusionment and subsequent disappearance from the world on 30th January, 1874 at the end.

If we observe closely the lives and works of both Basava and Rāmalinga swāmi, some striking similarities could be found between them. Like Basava, who was hailed as the incarnation of Nandi, the holy vehicle of Lord Śiva, the priest of Chidambaram Temple hailed Rāmalinga swāmi as a child of Lord Śiva. It is said that when he was five month old, his father (who died when Rāmalinga swāmi was six month old) took him to Chidambaram and that Rāmalinga swāmi as a baby, had smiled after having the vision of 'the Secret of Chidambaram' where the vacant space shown behind a screen that is drawn aside symbolizes 'the formless God'. The priest who had noticed the incident promptly prophesied about the child as the divine one of Lord Śiva. Basavaṇṇa, hailed from a Brahmin community, initially worked as a *gaṇaka* (Accountant) in the royal treasury of the King Bijjala II and later on became *Bhaṇḍāri* (Chief Treasurer). Similarly Rāmalinga swāmi also hailed from a forward community of Śaivite lineage called *Karuṇīgar* community *i.e.* the community known for holding the hereditary profession of Village Accountant and later was addressed as 'Vaḷḷalār', the philanthropist who had offered a lot of treasure of spirituality to people.

In both of their young lives, the ninth year was very important one and breaking point. At this year, Basava revolted against the *upanayana* ceremony and went to Kūḍala Sangama in search of spiritual truth. Similarly, the mischievous boy Rāmalinga swāmi on the serious concern shown by his *Aṇṇi* (his elder brother's wife), became at once so serious and sincere in his behaviour and subsequently withdrew himself from the activities of mundane day today business. He remained in a room shut all through the day. Strangely, he set a mirror against the wall and sat in front of it a naked flame. He quietly sat and meditated upon on the divine light for hours together. After few days, it is stated that at the age of nine, he saw the vision of Lord Murugaṇ of Tiruttanigai in the mirror. In the room, not taught by anybody, he apparently acquired his learning by himself. It is evident that in both of Basavaṇṇa and Rāmalinga swāmi lives – their ninth year seems to be the year of *dīkṣa* (Initiation) or the year of gaining momentum in their pursuit of spiritual journey of universal fellowship.

Basavaṇṇa married the two daughters (Gangadevi and Māyidevi also called Nīlalocharane) of his maternal uncle namely Baladeva, who arranged job for him as a *gaṇaka* in the royal treasury of the King Bijjala II. Basava, as he was more interested in spiritual life, led the actual family life only for a brief period. Rāmalinga swāmi also got married to the daughter of his elder sister but did not lead the family life even for a brief period. Strikingly, both were married but issueless and pursued their spiritual life with their own perceptions. But nowhere had they advocated the rejection of family life for the sake of spirituality. Slowly and steadily, Basava turned to become a great mystic, addressed as Basaveśvara. Being a householder, Rāmalinga swāmi, without enjoying the family life (strengthened by his spiritual qualities) became a great mystic in due course, addressed as **Aḍigal** (Revered Saint) and Vaḷḷalār, as he was specially known for his feeling of compassion.

Both Basava and Rāmalinga swāmi became mortals arguably at their prime time *i.e.* the former at the age of 62 and the latter at the age of 51. They had become united with the Supreme Being. As Machayya put it, “Basavaṇṇa was covered with the Light and became Void”.² Nīlaloḥane, his second wife, on hearing of his death, lamented saying that “he had become a bodiless being”. The *śaraṇas* compared the city of Kalyāṇa to a lamp filled with the foil of Basavaṇṇa’s devotion. They said the lamp had provided light to many people. But now the lamp was to be broken and the oil spilt, but the light had become one with the Divine Light. Here, it is to be noted that though the Vīraśaivites conceived and worshipped their personal God Śiva in the form of *Linga*, they often identified the Lord with the Divine Light in their spiritual union with the Supreme Being. In the case of Rāmalinga swāmi at the early age of his spiritual life itself, he moved away from worshipping the Gods Murugaṇ, Śiva, *etc.* And, so matured he was that he contended that the God is only one for all beings which is formless. So he emphasized the worshipping of God in the form of light and often addressed the God as *Arul-Perum-Jōthi* *i.e.* ‘The Grace Grand Light’. When Rāmalinga swāmi shut himself locked in a room for nearly a hundred days and was not found in the room when it was opened forcibly on the order of authorities, the people only saw the void and proclaimed that he ‘merged into the Supreme Light’. His followers obviously identify him with the light and sincerely worship him through that divine light.

The Precepts of Basaveśvara and Rāmalinga swāmi Cults

Basava and Rāmalinga swāmi, who were born in different castes, in different regions, at different times, were belonging originally to Śaivism and only to move away later to establish their own socio-religious movements called **Vīraśaiva Movement** and **Vaḷḷalār**

Movement respectively. One revived the Vīraśaiva faith and the other revived the then existing Śaiva faith of Tamil Nadu. One was a Vīraśaiva and the other was the Vallalār (Philanthropist). One sang *Vacanas* (Short prose lyrics spiritual in nature) in Kannada and the other *Arutpā* (< *Arul*+*Pā*), (Song of Compassion) in Tamil. The differences are real and at the same time some-what superficial. The common link between them is a unique kind of *Bhakti* i.e. uniting all the human beings under a universal faith and worship. Both these spiritual leaders seem to have one more common link – that is the *Nātha-Sampradāya*³ – the cult held by *yogīs* known for revolt against the religious dogmatism. The *nāthas* were Śaivites known for their revolt against the rigid religious order as well as caste and sex discrimination in religious pursuit. Women also occupied an important place among *nāthas*. They preached their philosophy through the speech of the common man. They hailed the body and soul equally. Rāmalinga swāmi claimed himself that he belongs to Siddha tradition, the counter part of *Nātha-sampradāya*, which existed in Tamil Nadu.

In Vīraśaiva Movement, *śaraṇas* approach the God as Master. The philosophical tenets on which the Vīraśaiva religion is based are called also *Śakti Viśiṣṭādvaita*, *Śivādvaita* and *Viśeṣādvaita*.⁴ Adherents of this faith thus naturally called Vīraśaivas, *Lingāyats* or *Aprakṛtas*. Any one with an unshaken faith in and devotion to Śiva can seek and attain *mukti* (Final liberation of the soul from the body and its absorption into the soul of the Universe), by becoming Vīraśaiva – including the lowest-born. Once he becomes a Vīraśaiva, he is released from the bonds that held him to his previous life; and he becomes one of the Vīraśaiva brotherhoods without any distinctions of wealth or status.

These rules apply to women as well as to men.

* The existing differences of *sāmānya* (Ordinary), *viśeṣa* (Special) and *nirbhara* (Those who are freed from burdens)

arise from men's actions only and have no reference to distinctions of birth. So any Vīraśaiva can attain the position of *Ṣaṭsthala Jñāni* by his/her devotion, piety, knowledge and actions.

- * Every *śaraṇa* must perform the *pūja* or worship of his deity only after finishing his daily ablutions.
- * The *śaraṇa* should never worship any other deity but the *linga* which he wears on his person.
- * The *śaraṇa* should never take any food without ceremonially offering the same to his deity.
- * The *śaraṇa* should never part with the *linga*, which he wears on his person. The *śaraṇa* should be a strict vegetarian. He/she should scrupulously avoid intoxicating drinks, non-vegetarian food, *bhāṅg* and such other things.
- * The *śaraṇa* should not dine with those who are not *Lingāyats* and should not even drink water touched by them.
- * Taboos arising from *pancha sūtakas* – caste, childbirth, spirits, excreta and social conduct – should not be observed by the *Lingāyats*.
- * Taking of only one meal a day and expiatory rites regulated by moons' waxing and waning, should not be observed by any *Lingāyat*.
- * Sacrificial rites involving injury to any living being should be eschewed. All religious observances should be confined to spiritual contemplation and attainment of knowledge.
- * Women are permitted to wear and worship the *linga* and are enjoined also to take their food only after offering it to the *linga*. So they should perform their daily worship even when they are in their menstrual periods.
- * There should be no re-marriage for women.
- * Burial rites should be observed for the dead.

Out of four *mārgas* of traditional Hinduism, such as *dāsa mārgam* (the approach to God as Master), *satputra mārgam* (The approach to God as Father), *saha mārgam* (The approach to God as Friend) and *san mārgam* (The approach to God by identifying oneself with him), Rāmalinga swāmi after blissful experience felt that *san-*

mārgam was the most suitable one for all human beings to experience the blissful union of ‘the Grace Grand Light’.

O God who art mysterious! All-possessing and glorious Light of Grace! We beseech thee to grant unto us, that from now on our minds be kept untainted by the varying observances of religions, sects, *mārgas* and *varṇa-āśrama*. We pray thee to make the truth of Oneness of all souls in love; the chief ideal of *śuddha san-mārga* abound in us at all times and at all places. O Lord of Gracious Light! We hail thee for thy unique and gracious compassion.

(A prayer song written by Rāmalinga swāmi to be recited by the Sangamites with a few selected verses from *Aruṭpā*), (As quoted by Francis, *Ibid.*, p. 81).

The Credo of this universal faith is:

1. There is only one God.
2. The God should be worshipped in the form of Effulgence of Light by true love.
3. Petty gods and deities should not be worshipped.
4. Sacrifices of living creatures should not be performed in the name of those gods.
5. Flesh of creatures should not be eaten.
6. No differences of caste, religions, sects, *etc.*, should be observed.
7. Every life should be held in as much regard as one’s own life on the basis of the principle of Universal Brotherhood, on the principle that all lives are equal in the eyes of God. Unlike the Universal Brotherhood of other societies, which sprang up in India and abroad, the Universal Brotherhood of this society extends to animals and even plants.
8. Assuaging the hunger of the poor is the key to the kingdom of Heaven.
9. The dead should not be cremated, but should be buried.
10. All superstitious beliefs, customs and practices should be given up.

Rejection of Brahmanistic Values

The aforesaid tenets of Basaveśvara's Vīraśaivism and of Rāma-linga Swāmi's Vaḷḷalār Movement/Vaḷḷalār Cult seem to be identical on many accounts. Both the movements strikingly say no to ritual sacrifice of animals and birds and emphasize strict Vegetarianism. They both severely condemn the worship of many gods and deities. Both the movements eschew the caste, creed and sex discrimination and also all superstitious beliefs, customs and practices. Further, both of them give equal importance to women in their religious practices. Since these movements strongly felt that there is no death to the souls, both advocate for burial and not for cremation. Rāmalinga swāmi as a Siddha did not tolerate dead bodies cremated. He chided people when they cremate the dead ones instead of burying. "When the child is born, you bathe it and bring it up with utmost care. But when someone dies, you cremate the corpse. You are devilish! How did you consent to take to this practice? You put fire on those who slept in the night and forgot to get up in the morning. What 'powerful'(!) people you are! You are only worthy to be praised as people whose hearts are hard as 'precious diamond'(!) rocks! Why were you born and why do you move about calling yourselves 'human beings'? This body of ours is God given. It is crime to cremate the same" (*TAP* 5608, Tr. Francis).

Both Basavaṇṇa and Rāmalinga swāmi belonging to the aforesaid traditions preached what they practiced. They were known for their truly reforming zeal. Both out-rightly rejected the notion of caste based on birth. "None understands well the myth of caste and colour distinction" (*TAP* 4174), thus said Rāmalinga swāmi. While speaking about the distinctions made among the various castes as low and high, he comes out with his new theory based on spirituality: "You fail to see the fact that only those who are free from old age and death belong to the good caste. You people of the world speak of

high caste and low caste. You do see people belonging to both castes die. Know for certain that these polluted castes are nothing but filthy worms” (TAP 5572). He rebuked those who would engage themselves in vain disputes and controversies relating to the superiority of their sects over others (TAP 5566). It is to be mentioned here that before this mystic, that too nearly seven centuries ago, Basavaṇṇa had originally voiced his serious concern for such kind of caste distinctions hindering social harmony. In fact, “Basava dedicated his whole life to the task of doing away with the caste system, and both in his doctrines and in his practice he articulated this objective. He rejected the ideas of purity, pollution, and hereditary occupation associated with the caste system. Though by birth a Brahman, he uncompromisingly condemned the notion of social distance by which the upper castes had dominated the lower castes” (Ishwaran, *Op.cit.*, p. 168).

In Basava’s cult, caste was based on the kind of work a man did to earn his bread. “Social structure conditioned by caste became vitiated with the prevailing notions of high born and low, based on the kind of work or occupation. It divided man from man and corrupted the springs of humanity and the brotherhood of all men under ONE God.⁵ **“God is One though known by several names”** (Vacana 613), thus says Basava. He denounced caste as a sin and rightly considered it as totally irrelevant and meaningless in spiritual pursuits. He said, “None can become *śaraṇa* without abandoning caste and sub-caste distinctions” (Vacana 868, quoted by Ishwaran). In positive terms, a *śaraṇa* is one who recognizes the equality of all human beings and works for their welfare. He is of the view that “The Brahmans do not practice what they preach? One garb for themselves, and another for their scriptures! Kūḍala Sangamadeva, this is proof that Brahmans born in Untouchable wombs, enjoy beef” (Vacana 574, Tr. K. Ishwaran). “Brahman by caste, he annihilates the essence of Brahma when he stretches his

hand for alms for someone else's sins", thus Basava ridiculed the Brahmins (*Vacana* 582, Tr. K. Ishwaran). Further, out of anger he condemned: "Loaded with the burden of the Vedas, the Brahman is a veritable donkey" (*Vacana* 586, Tr. K. Ishwaran). He rightly clarifies his status: "I am not a Brahman, wasted like a dried-up stream, enmeshed in net knit with gold, women and land" (*Vacana* 715, Tr. K. Ishwaran). In his process of condemning the caste and occupational hierarchy, he went to the extent of establishing a loving relationship with those so-called low-class people. Angered by the sheer injustice of caste system, he said ironically:

I am the son of an Untouchable, Cennayya
And I am segregated by the state of pollution.
(*Basava Vacana* 347, Tr. K. Ishwaran)

Father is our untouchable Cennayya
Grandfather our drummer Kakkayya
Brother is Bommayya
(*Basava Vacana* 348, Tr. K. Ishwaran)

If I claim myself as a Brahman,
my God would laugh at me.
(*Basava Vacana* 344, Tr. K. Ishwaran)

The Concept of God

Both Basavaṇṇa and Rāmalinga swāmi wanted harmony between words and deeds. In fact they practiced what they preached. Their utterances are the records of their mystic experiences. They experienced the same pangs of separation from God and the same bliss of union. They were pained to see that men were worldly and staying away from the right path. Religion in practice came to be regarded as nothing but dogma. Both of them felt that *bhakti*, and that too of dedication and surrender to only one God, would lead to salvation.

You who caused my birth are the Upright One
 One who schooled me in worldly bonds
 I believed it to be Śiva's pace and path
 You have burnt away my eight conceits
 Subject to Your fierce norms,
 I met your revered *śaraṇas*
 Protector of creation, I surrender to You,
 Be compassionate.
 (*Vacana* 482, Tr. K. Ishwaran)

This *vacana* shows that the totally compassionate One, God who is our dear father and mother, expects from those believing in Him, not blind devotion but acceptance of the norms and laws governing His creation. God wants His followers to believe that he lives, not in temples, but in the hearts of His devotees.

When Basavaṇṇa witnessed that people knowingly or unknowingly were worshipping too many gods, even petty objects, he became irritated and worried over their attitude. He ridiculed them in the following *vacana*.

The pot is a god. The winnowing
 fan is a god. The stone in the
 street is a god. The comb is a
 god. The bowstring is also a
 god. The bushel is a god and the
 spouted cup is a god.
 Gods, gods, there are so many
 there's no place left
 or a foot.
 There is only
 one god. He is our Lord
 of the Meeting Rivers.
 (*Basava Vacana* 561, Tr. A.K. Ramanujan)

In another *vacana*, he further expresses his worry as follows:

There are gods, and gods, and gods:
 some melt within a tongue of flame;
 some are cheap,
 and are sold for a song;
 some hide underground,
 and dangers pass them by.
 O save me from these deities false,
 Thou only one,
 O Lord, Kūḍala Sangama!
 (Tr. M. Chidananda murthy)

He is of the view that: “For a faithful wife, there is only one husband. For a devotee capable of faith, there is only one God. No, no, the attachment to other gods is evil. No, no, going after other gods is whoring! Certainly, if he were to see all this, Kūḍala Sangamadeva would slice off your nose” (*Vacana* 616, Tr. K. Ishwaran), thus Basava attests his conviction. Though initially Rāmalinga swāmi worshipped Lords Muruga, Śiva, *etc.* he got the realization soon that there was only one God that was formless.

God is One indeed!
 In the divine Hall of Wisdom
 wherefrom comes the light
 which gives rise to all *Siddhis*
 (TAP 3270, Tr. T.D. Francis)

Thus Rāmalinga swāmi declared the nature of God which manifests itself in the form of light. In explaining the God’s transcendent nature, he says: “He is beyond the seven spheres and even Vedas cannot find his real depth. He is in those spheres and absorbs them all in Himself. He is such a comprehensive sphere – the sphere of *Śuddha Śivam*” (TAP 4157). Rāmalinga swāmi proclaimed that the God had shown the path of *vedas* and *āgamas*; the paths prescribed by the *purāṇas* and *itiḥāsas* and thereby the cunningness implicit in them (TAP 3767). He added that the *śāstras* are nothing but pack of

lies (*TAP* 5570); the four *varṇas*, *āśramas*, the *purāṇas* and the rest of them are all childish affairs indeed (*TAP* 4174). So he disliked the *mārga* tradition for obvious reasons like his counterpart of Karnataka and thereby eschewed the worship of many Gods and minor deities. He condemned them as follows:

Those who think that there are many many gods
those who speak of many many ways
of reaching God,
those who talk of several scriptures
spawned by falsehood,
they are people without enlightenment.
(*TAP* 5566, Tr. G. Vanmikanathan)

He spoke from his personal experiences: “My Lord, You instructed and told me that many a sectarian group founded for personal interests and the stories told in such groups, the way of salvation shown in them, the visions and the deities upheld in them are all nothing but childish affairs” (*TAP* 4173). Besides the similarities cited above, there are quite a number of common features found even in their words uttered by Basaveśvara and Rāmalinga swāmi. **Vīra-śaivism**, though the word literally means ‘the **Militant Śaivism**’, earnestly advocates compassion for all beings like Vallālār Movement. Vedic religion, as it claims, is highly concerned for the smooth survival of the universe, however, it indulged in animal sacrifice ritual right from the beginning. Basaveśvara and Rāmalinga swāmi – the two great revivalists of Hinduism, give vital importance to the concept of compassion.

Where is the religion devoid of compassion, Lord?
Compassion should be shown to all living creatures!
Compassion, Lord, is the root of religion.
No other position is acceptable to *Kūḍala Sangamadeva*.
(*Vacana* 247, Tr. K. Ishwaran)

Thus asserts his position Basava. In his another *vacana*, he strikes the note piety and compassion, when a goat was being taken to the sacrificial fire:

The sacrificial lamb brought for the festival
 ate up the green leaf brought for the decorations.
 Not knowing a thing about the kill,
 It wants only to fill its belly:
 born that day, to die that day.
 But tell me:
 did the killers survive
 O Lord of the meeting rivers?
 (Tr. A.K. Ramanujan)

This peculiar feeling of compassion could be often found as a pivot in Rāmalinga swāmi's philosophy and preaching. Often, he expressed his strong feeling of compassion in several of his poems and preaching. His agony over killing the animals and birds in the name of worship, knows no bounds. He vehemently condemned animal sacrifices. He declared those who indulge in killing and meat-eating as immature beings as far as the spiritual life is concerned. He asserted: "Those who kill and those who consume flesh do not belong to us. They are aliens." While expressing his kind sentiments over the cruel killing of animals he laments:

They plant demeaning little gods
 over the land, and in the names of these
 They kill sheep and swine and fowl and bulls,
 Bleeding their robust lives –
 I am witness to this, and weary;
 My reason fails, my senses reel.
 The red houses of abhorrence
 of these wretched little gods
 It pains me to see.
 (Tr. Purasu Balakrishnan)

He was not only compassionate to the core to human beings and animals but strangely also for trees and plants. The following *Arutpā* reveals his inner shuddering on witnessing the horror of killing animals:

I shuddered at the horrid killer's
 swift-descending axe on the prostrate life.
 When with my eyes I saw
 the writhing agony of severed life,
 or the fishermen's net on the sand
 with bait, or rope with noose, or trap,
 Lord, Lord, My Father, You do know,
 How, how, shall I utter my agony?
 (Tr. Purasu Balakrishnan)

Seeing withered corn, my spirit dropped
 watching the wretch that begged from door to door
 unavailing, and hungry sank to sleep.
 I brooded. At right of long-racking disease,
 I shuddered. Starvings, poor, too proud to beg,
 and spirit-broken, broke me.
 (TAP 3471, Tr. Purasu Balakrishnan)

Because of his tireless preaching highlighting the importance of being compassionate, 'the Pure Vegetarianism' got momentum in Tamil Nadu and still exists on a considerable scale even to-day. When he saw that people were extremely attached with the worldly pleasures which are transient in nature and behaved inhumanly, he strongly rebuked them. "You are mad people! You say that you live in abundance but would not care to think of the Lord with eagerness of mind and eye. You move about wearing fine garments with attendants at your service; but would not even look at the poor and hunger who come to you" (TAP 5556). It is a known fact that hunger is a basic suffering of all beings. Out of all beings it is only man who is able to understand the pain of hungry of his fellow

human beings as well as animals, birds, and so on. “Those who hasten to remove the suffering of hungry (of all beings) are indeed blessed ones”, thus declared Rāmalinga swāmi. In this connection, he appealed to the rich to minimize expenditure on luxurious celebrations and contribute liberally for the cause of feeding the poor (Francis, *Op.cit.*, p. 72). He felt pity for the people who lead the life sans the compassion. He observed: “Your life is made up with utter lies. You do not realize that when your foul and unreal bodies are knocked by death, you will go to hell as worthless worms. You make fun of those who stand before you in humility with mouth closed and hands folded in respect. You do not have compassion at all! You are meaner than flies that sit on eatables dropped down. Do you profit anything? You mad people of the world!” (TAP 5564).

Seeing the people’s attitude of wasting their lives in meaningless prayer and searching for gods, he reminded them that there is only one God; That is in the form of Light. Rāmalinga swāmi cautions them in the following poem:

O men of the world!
 It is all enough that
 Till now you wasted your lives.
 This is the time for
 The Supreme’s arrival.
 If you come right now
 Certainly you will feel pleasure.
 I am not lying
 This is the fact.
 Why should I utter this fact?
 Because of sympathy
 That you should also experience
 The pleasure I had experienced.
 (Tr. Purasu Balakrishnan)

Out of sympathy and piety, he as the dearest and unique son of the Lord (TAP 3895 and 4057) earnestly endeavoured to establish that his message is literally the message coming from the Lord. He said convincingly: “My friends, it is my firm belief that the words I speak are in fact the words of the Lord. This is the opportune time to meet the Lord who is to come” (TAP 5502). He also stated that he had seen the father and had attained the gift of deathlessness (TAP 4903).

The Greatness of Two Spiritual Beings

Though Basava and Rāmalinga swāmi were the beacon lights and dynamic leaders of their respective movements, they never thought that they were great from others rather they always belittled themselves out of humility. Basavaṇṇa in the following *vacana* describes himself as the lowest among the low.

A lesser man than I
 No, there is none;
 Greater than Shiva's devotees,
 No, there is none.
 Witness thy feet,
 Witness my mind;
 Mind is witness.
 This is a test for me,
 Lord Kūḍala Sangama.
 (Tr. M. Chidananda murthy)

In a *vacana* (318), he says: “I am the watch-dog guarding the house of *śaraṇas*”. Thus, ‘humility’ or ‘self-abasement’ was, for Basavaṇṇa, the way to achieve the love of Kūḍala Sangamadeva. Similarly Rāmalinga swāmi also again and again belittles himself. He was such a pious soul known for the uttermost humbleness. His

humility manifested itself in every aspect of his life. In a song, he himself revealed:

Shy of walking with my arms swinging
 I walk about with my arms crossed on the chest.
 Having to show my bare body
 I hid it entirely with white cloth.
 (TAP 3461, Tr. G. Vanmikanathan)

But, in the matter of his religious faith, and propagating his ideals, he was as determined and darling personality as Basavaṇṇa.

Basaveśvara showed a tremendous force in the socio-religious life of Karnataka during 12th century, as it was elsewhere stated. In order to make religion really a meaningful one, Basava felt that there was a prime need to construct religion on the basis of experience so as to enthuse the masses. In a way, he put religion on a democratic basis and with a deep foundation in action. He preached and practiced 'Knowledge in action'. The society, Basavaṇṇa envisaged, consisted of people with a passionate love for God and for work. Truly, it was to be a casteless and classless society comprising in harmony the several professions and services to the day. In the *Anubhava Maṇṭapa*, there existed hunters, drummers, cobblers, washermen, weavers, tailors, oil crushers, tanners, farmers, *etc.* as members and enjoyed the equal status with other *śaraṇas* of higher caste lineage.

Vīraśaivism as a new religion founded the following three key socio-religious institutions to carry out its ideology of reformation and social harmony.

1. **Anubhava Maṇṭapa** (Hall of Spiritual/God's Experience).
2. **Dasoha** (Community Dining, Kitchen and Service)
3. **Kāyaka** (Dignity of Labour)

The *Anubhava Maṇṭapa* served as the ideal platform for all sorts of people, irrespective of their caste, creed, sex and profession to get equal treatment and experience of God. Women were also given equal status and highly regarded as noble souls like Akka Mahādevi, Āyadakki Lakkamma, Moḷigeya Mahādevi, Nīlamma, Nāgamma, *etc.* Vīraśaivism, through *dasoha* system sincerely entertained community kitchen, dining and service. It served as the powerful institutional infrastructure, which attracted a lot of low caste non-Brahmins into Vīraśaivism and made their new religion a serious threat to the then existing religion. Whosoever embraced Vīraśaivism, indeed felt harmony and happiness, when their real problem was taken care of by the *dasoha* system. According to Basavaṇṇa, *dasoha* means hard work for one's livelihood and for the maintenance of society.

The institutional system of *kāyaka* of Vīraśaivism was also innovative one, in which occupational equality was maintained. People, in *varṇāśrama dharma* were not allowed to choose their occupation according to their wish. Caste played the role to determine one's occupation and accordingly he/she was being treated in the society. Whereas the *Śaraṇas* of Vīraśaivism, hailing from different parts of land, freely chose their occupation. *Śaraṇa* colleagues proclaimed that one's chosen occupation is *kāyaka* and '*kāyaka is kailāsa*' (Bread labour is Heaven).

Except this institutional system of *kāyaka*, the other two socio-religious institutions of Vīraśaivism such as *Anubhava Maṇṭapa* and *dasoha* were found with a subtle difference in Rāmalinga swāmi's scheme of things too. Though it is not possible to see any direct influence of Basavaṇṇa on Rāmalinga swāmi, yet there are some common features found in the socio-religious institutions founded by the latter. *Sattiya Jñāna Sabai* (Hall of True Knowledge) established by him on 25th January 1872 was a hall similar like *Anubhava Maṇṭapa*. In *Anubhava Maṇṭapa* all Vīraśaivites are

free to share their spiritual experiences regularly whereas in *Sattiya Jñāna Sabai*, it was only *Vaḷḷalār* (who was the sole beacon light of his movement), who used to preach the spiritual knowledge and share his experience of wisdom with his followers. By all means, it served as an academy in preparing the human souls for the realization of God and their subsequent salvation. In the hall/ academy, there are seven curtains in Black, Blue, Green, Red, Yellow, White and mixed colours, which conceal the light within. When all these curtains are unveiled, there appears a thick glass slab of about five feet in height inside which there is a bright lamp. The Black curtain represents *māya śakti* (Primordial Energy) which veils the kingdom of the 'Self'; The Blue curtain represents *kriya śakti* (Power of Action) which veils the 'Self'; The Green curtain represents *para śakti* (Divine Energy) which veils the 'Divine Space'; The Red curtain represents *iccha śakti* (Power of Desire) which veils the knowing faculty of the 'Self'; Yellow curtain represents *jñāna śakti* (Power of knowledge) which veils the truth; White curtain represents *ādhi śakti* (Original Energy) which veils the 'Space of the Lord'; The mixed colour curtain represents *cit śakti* (Power of Pure Intellect) which veils the higher experiences.

The method of worship in *Jñāna Sabai* as laid down by Rāma-linga swāmi was entirely new one. All those who assemble for worship should congregate outside the *Sabai* and softly chant praises of the Lord *i.e. Aruḷ Perum Jōthi - Taṇip Perum Karuṇai* (The Grace Grand Light – The Qualified Grand Compassion). Meat eaters should stay on the outskirts of the *Sabai* and worship. Musical instruments like the drum, *etc.*, offerings like cooked rice, coconuts, plantains, *etc.*, worship by lamp and incense, distribution of *prasād* like *vibhūti* (Sacred Ash), none of these (which are common in the worshipping of temples of Tamil Nadu) should intrude into the *Sabai*.

In the similar model of *dasoha* of Vīraśaivism, Rāmalinga swāmi founded *Sattiya Dharuma Sālai* (True Free Feeding House) on 23rd May 1867, where irrespective of caste, creed, sex and profession, everyone dine together even today at Vaḍalūr. Rāmalinga swāmi felt that unless the hunger of people is subsided/doused, it is not possible to expect them to walk in the pathway of God's realization. "Assuaging the hunger of the poor is the key to the kingdom of Heaven" – according to Rāmalinga swāmi. It is said that the fire that was lit by Rāmalinga swāmi in the kitchen that day has never gone out and that no one has been turned away hungry from the food queue.

Besides these aforesaid institutions, Rāmalinga swāmi established the foremost important society called **Samarasa Śuddha Sanmārga Sattiya Sangam** (Society for Pure Truth in Universal Selfhood) – a name transcending religions at Vaḍalūr in the year 1865. Those who belonged to this society were called *Sādhus*. Though these *sādhus* resembled Buddhist, Jaina and Śaivite saints, they differed from them in respect of their connection of house holding.

Rāmalinga swāmi in addition to the above-discussed institutions, probably influenced by the religion of Christianity, found a school called *Sanmārga Bhodini* (The School for the Fellowship) in the year 1867. The unique features of the school were that it was open to all, irrespective of age and that three languages viz., Tamil, Sanskrit and English were taught specified in that order. It was unfortunate that the school however did not run for long.

When we try to understand Basaveśvara and Rāmalinga swāmi with their different socio-religious and political backgrounds and taking their spiritual utterances into account, several points of similarity can be shown at the end. First of all, both were darlings of masses. Basaveśvara was a revolutionary leader who had fought

against all evils of socio-religious and cultural menaces with lot of courage and conviction and succeeded to a great extent by stirring the people to come under his egalitarian community system. Rāma-linga swāmi was a Siddha of *Sanmārga* who had gently pointed out people's flaws and faults with lot of solutions to undertake the spiritual path for the blissful 'deathless life' and fairly succeeded only in bringing the people to vegetarianism to a greater extent and miserably failed in his other missions.

They both were basically *Śaivites* and *jogīs* who sincerely tried to revive the traditional *Śaivism* existing at their respective time by eschewing the tenets of ant-social and incorporating the rational spirits of Buddhism and Jainism into their respective movement. Both were excellent preachers. One was a revolutionary leader in vision and action whereas the other was a pious rebel who propagated the gospel of the heavenly kingdom to every nook and corner of society.

Both were strikingly rationalists and compassionates to the core and upheld the Vegetarianism forever. In Basaveśvara's scheme of things and agendas, 'Compassion' and 'Vegetarianism' become part and parcel whereas in Rāma-linga swāmi's scheme they just occupy the significant and foremost place. In the latter's gospel, *jīva kārūṇyam* is affirmed as a universal principle. He seeks to build upon it the brotherhood of all men which he calls *Āṇmanēya Orumaippāḍu* ('Oneness of Soul in Love'), which is the only prerequisite for entering into *Śuddha Sanmārga* or the True Path of attaining grace.

Both emphasized for a 'Universal Religion' in which no caste, creed, sex and profession is a matter of concern. Basava unequivocally rejected the social order based on the *varṇāśrama dharma* ideology of Brahmanism and strove to replace it with a new socio-religious order which systematically negated the *varṇāśrama* ideology and institutional structure. The society he founded was Śiva

society or *śaraṇa* society. It was a society articulating the ideal of universal humanity, founded on the principle of the equality of all human beings, and counter posed uncompromisingly to the antecedent Brahman order stratified along caste, occupational and sex distinctions (Ishwaran, *Op.cit.*, p. 124).

Both severely advocated the worship of only one God *i.e.* Śiva in the case of Basaveśvara and the **Arul Perum Jōthi** (the Grace Grand Light) in the case of Rāmalinga swāmi. Both Basava and Rāmalinga swāmi venerated Lord Śiva in their hymns. While the former hailed Śiva for ever, the latter at his fag end of life ended with the God of Grace Grand Light. The former mystic in some *vacanas* worshiped God Śiva as formless one and that was the case hailed by the latter mystic.

Containing yourself all formlessness
 You are everything, Lord; You are formless, too
 The eye of the universe, Lord;
 the face of the universe, You
 Its arms as well, Lord, *Kūḍala Sangamadeva*.
 (Basava Vacana 531, Tr. K. Ishwaran)

They both severely condemned the worship of several gods and rejected the practice of temple and the idol worship. “Right from the beginning, Basava had been an uncompromising opponent of the temple system as he believed that it had sustained the institution of warfare, supported the policies of invasion and conquest, and protected religious orthodoxy” (Ishwaran, *Ibid.*, 74). That is why Basava founded a novel institution called *Anubhava Maṇṭapa* – a sort of prayer hall to replace the existing temple system. In the case of Rāmalinga swāmi, though he practiced temple worship by visiting several temples of Murugaṇ and Śiva in his early days, at later period when he matured spiritually enough, he too established a similar set-up called *Sattiya Jñāna Sabai*, where no idol worship, ritualistic ceremonies take place. Both *Anubhava Maṇṭapa* and

Sattiya Jñāna Sabai are assumed as prayer houses where religious discourses were delivered and experiences of pious souls were shared among the followers.

Regarding funeral of dead bodies, both the mystics seem to have more or less the same opinion. In any community, death is perceived as an act of mourning and accordingly taking part in the ritual is considered as a polluted task. As a departure from Vedic rules, the Vīraśaivites bury their dead ones instead of cremating. The reason is: “Together with life depart four elements of the five which constitute a living body, and mix with those of the Cosmos. The remaining element should therefore be united with that of the Cosmos. There is no impurity at all in the case of death. There should not be any mourning, since the dead man is one with Śiva. It is an occasion for rejoicing and not for mourning” (Nandimath, *Op.cit.*, p. 81). After taking the dead body to the graveyard, the Vīraśaivites carefully place the corpse in the niche in a cave-like grave, in a sitting posture of *padmāsana* (A sitting posture of Hindu ascetic in which he sits with thigh crossed) and place his *Linga* in his palm, the position of daily worship during life being maintained. At no point of time the concept of impurity is considered while burying the body. The cardinal point of the Vīraśaiva philosophy is that the soul comes from Śiva and returns to Him after death. So there should not be any sort of mourning. The technical word for death in Vīraśaivism is *Lingaikya*, absorption in the *Linga*. Even today the Vīraśaivites do not use the word ‘death’, but the technical word (*Ibid.*, p. 85). Similarly in the case of Siddhas, the word *samādhi* (generally denoting the place where the dead one was put into peace) – a yogic word indicating absence of external consciousness on account of absorption into mental vision, is used. It is also used in Vīraśaivism in the sense of a place where a man, who achieves such absorption, sits; therefore the Vīraśaivas, who do not believe in the death of a member, but think him to be

absorbed in mental vision, give the name *samādhi* to the place where such a one is deposited.

The Siddha Rāmalinga swāmi, with a reason of subtle difference, would also not advocate for cremating the dead bodies. He believed in raising of the dead bodies back to life. Strangely enough, he speaks of the resurrection of the body and ‘the coming of the Lord’. He seems to have borrowed these concepts from Christianity and Islam, as these ideas are new to the Śaivite as well as Siddha traditions. He categorically condemns the custom of cremating in the following words: “This body of ours is God given. It is a crime to cremate the same. Although I warn you, you continue to cremate. The blessed day is at hand when the Siddha-Lord will raise all who are dead. Won’t you understand this and see the reason why the good people always buried their dead? You are like cows that are blind” (*TAP* 5608, Tr. T.D. Francis). Rāmalinga swāmi emphasizes that raising the dead is eschatological phenomenon which is linked up with the coming of the Lord (Francis, *Ibid.*, pp. 60–61).

Out of all tenets, ‘social reform’ is the dearest one to the heart of Basavaṇṇa, whereas to Rāmalinga swāmi, it was ‘compassion for all living creatures’, resulting in his insistence on Vegetarianism. Naturally, Basaveśvara stirred the social revolution in the 12th century whereas Rāmalinga swāmi made a stirring appeal to the Tamil people to follow Vegetarianism and succeeded considerably in his attempt.

Last days of both of them were, perhaps, saddened by undesirable turn of events. Both were certainly unhappy over not achieving the utopian society for which they spent their whole life and energy. “As Basava began to work as the treasurer under Bijjaḷa, significant events took place in rapid succession. Through hard work and devotion and devotion to service, he was promoted to the position of Chief Treasurer of the Kingdom. Though

technically his office was concerned with finance and accounting, it soon came to include the portfolios of the army and revenue. Thus he was simultaneously and variously called, the *mantri* (Minister-Advisor), *daṇḍanāyaka* (Chief of the army), and *pradhāni* (Chief Minister)”, (Ishwaran, *Op.cit.*, p. 66). His rapid rise in the royal kingdom soon brought hostility from the jealous royal servants. His seniors were turned into as his enemies. The traditional Brahmins too hated him because he was fulminating against the traditional religious system. “Rejecting the caste hierarchy and its principles and its religious doctrine, Basava preached that there should be equality not simply among men but also animals – in fact, among all living entities. These ideas were anathema to orthodox ears” (*Ibid.*, p. 67). These orthodox people created unnecessary fuss over (religious fervour of Basava) even petty things like offering of *kētaki* flower to Lord Śiva. However, Basava didn’t yield to their criticisms but steadily carried on his mission and progressed in his spiritual journey. He started distributing his personal wealth and resources to the needy and the hungry, and for the sustenance of those who were engaged in the work of propagating his ideas and ideology. The opponents accused him that he was misusing his power and carrying out these activities by spending from the royal treasury. The King yielded to their pressure and ordered enquiry and at the end found nothing against him. It is said that originally eighteen crores were missing in the first instance of checking carried out in the absence of Basava but when the same was done in the presence of Basava, the King found the right amount of eighteen crores multiplied by a thousand times (*Ibid.*, p. 68). Virtually the king realized his mistake and sought for forgiveness from Basava.

Within the *jangamas*, some were against his treating all *jangamas* as genuine, because they thought that some of them could be imposters. Basava held them all equal in his society of *Linga* and

was not worried for their past history or present position, and so on. In translating his words into action, several times he visited the so-called low-born *jangamas*' houses and performed the worship of Śiva and dined with them also. This sort of his activities, construed as catastrophe by orthodox Brahmins, became the matter of headache and nuisance to the King when the so-called upholders of *māṇav dharma* took to the notice of the latter. Further, the establishment of the institution called *Anubhava Maṇṭapa*, and his preaching and practicing of *dasoha*, and *kāyaka* systems in society created furour among the opponents. This ultimately upset Basava and made him feel dejected and utterly sad that his own disciples questioned his commitment of true social welfare activities. The final straw in his action was his conducting of marriage between an upper-caste bride (the daughter of a Brahmin Madhuvarasa) and a low-caste bridegroom (the son of an untouchable Haralayya). "This was the event that initiated the process leading to the eventual downfall of the Kalyāṇa kingdom. Bijjala arrested both Madhuvarasa and Haralayya and brought them to his court. He had their eyes gouged, and had them killed in the most inhuman fashion. The *jangama* community found this too much to accept quietly. Their anger reached a boiling point and a crisis was generated which Basava could not control. The more radical wing of his movement were (*sic*: was) ready to meet violence with violence" (*Ibid.*, p. 80). He saw himself that the army was killing his followers mercilessly. Unable to bear the terror of history, he returned to Kūḍala Sangama – the holy place where he had spent his youth in study and meditation. Before leaving for the place, as the most dejected soul Basava told: "The drama that was to be enacted on the world's stage is now over, Lord, I have suffered enough. Please get me back!" (*Ibid.*, p. 85), he reached Kūḍala Sangama where he spent his last few days before uniting with the *Linga*. There in the bosom of his chosen Deity he attained *samādhi*, saying, according to

Harihara: “O Father bring the curtain down on this play, being enacted on the earth” (*“Sāku māḍai taṇḍē lōkadāṭava innu”* – Harihara, *Basavarājadevara Ragaḷe*).

Similarly, Rāmalinga swāmi’s last days were also saddened by several events particularly the blasphemy case litigated by the Śaiva fundamentalist Ārumuga Nāvalar. As a result, his Universal religion and brotherhood, compassion for all living beings for which he had laboured all along his life shattered completely. These undesired developments caused him profound disillusionment which led him to withdraw himself from all activities. Like Basavaṇṇa, he therefore, stopped talking to people and shut himself into a room and sought the mercy of God there (like the same manner which he did at the age of nine), for the spiritual light and subsequent merger with the Supreme Light. Rāmalinga swāmi, though sincerely tried to bring all people into his universal faith more or less in the line of Islam and Christianity, sadly failed in his mission due to various reasons. He was the disgusted soul who fully understood his failure at the fag end of his life in not bringing the people to his new radical faith. Whatever the impact/influence Rāmalinga swāmi once had on the people, soon started evaporating after his ‘disappearance’. No systematic and serious attempt was made to spread the message of Rāmalinga swāmi (other than his Vegetarianism) among the people and thus to strengthen the organizational set-up of the Sanmārga Sangam in Tamil Nadu. The Sangam gradually deviated from the main teachings of Rāmalinga swāmi by entertaining communalism and encouraging idol worship, particularly of the image of Rāmalinga swāmi. The attempts to bring together the leaders of the Sangam and Missions to work out a constructive programme of activities have not yet been fruitful. In fact, “many of his immediate disciples – were not as yet ready for the quantum leap that would change the current egoistic mentality swearing by division and separativity and enacting inequity and misery into a new consciousness that would be wedded to the true

Light and practice compassion and grace”, as observed by K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar (*Op.cit.*, p. 139). To his dismay he found that many of his followers were slipping away from the ideals of *Śuddha Sanmārga*. He noticed a growing tendency among them to regard him as a demi-god. Rāmalinga swāmi condemned their attitude: “Please listen to me, ye men of Sanmārga Sangam. I speak, prostrating myself at your feet. Only consider me as one among you. Worship only the God Almighty. Do not speak in the fashion of people who profess false religions and spoil your wisdom” (*TAP* 5452). The indisciplined life of his followers and disappointing behaviour of people in general towards his teachings were most painful to him. In 1873 he ordered the *Jñāna Sabai* building to be locked up and he kept the keys with himself. After closing the Sabai, Rāmalinga swāmi made his abode in a nearby village called Mēṭṭukkuppam. He stayed there in a small hut which he named *Siddhi Vaḷāgam* (Abode of Siddhi). Soon he decided to get absorbed in *Yoga Nittirai* or *Samādhi*. On 30th January 1874, Rāmalinga swāmi delivered his final discourse to his disciples. He said:

Friends, I opened a shop but there was none to purchase; so I have closed it. I will not be visible to your eyes for a certain period, although I will be universally present in the world. My imperishable body will enter into the bodies of all living beings. I will reappear again at the proper time after having preached my message in other countries. Till then take to the path of *jīva kāruṇyam*. Worship God in the form of light and attain salvation.

Rāmalinga swāmi went into his room and stretched himself on a carpet. He gave orders that the room be locked from outside. He had already told his disciples not to open the room and not to be disappointed as he would not be visible to their eyes. The news of the miraculous disappearance of Rāmalinga swāmi spread every-where. J.H. Garstin, I.C.S., the then Collector of

South Arcot District came to the spot and made an enquiry. He did not order the room to be opened. Instead he contributed twenty rupees for a feast to the poor arranged in memory of Rāmalinga swāmi. He also wrote a few lines about Rāmalingar in the *South Arcot District Manual* published in 1878 and it was later reprinted in the *South Arcot District Gazetteer* in 1906. The following is an extract from the collector's report (Francis, *Op.cit.*, p. 18):

...In 1874, he locked himself in a room (still in existence in Mēṭṭukkuppam, hamlet of Karuṅkuḷi) which he used for *samādhi* or mystic meditation, and instructed his disciples not to open it for some time. He has never been seen since and the room is still locked. It is held by those who still believe in him that he was miraculously made one with his God and that in the fullness of time he will reappear to the faithful.

The report concludes with these words:

Whatever may be thought of his claims to be a religious leader, it is generally admitted, by those who are judges of such matters, that his poems, many of which have been published, stand on a high plane, and his story is worth noting as an indication of the directions which religious fervour may still take.

Finally, the question may be asked whether Basaveśvara and Rāmalinga swāmi succeeded in their respective attempt and mission. The answer will have to be both 'Yes' and 'No'. Throughout history, it is believed that God has revealed Himself to humanity through a series of 'Divine Messengers', each of whom has founded a great religion or sect. It is also said that a succession of divine teachers were sent for the purpose of educating humanity about the Creator and for cultivating the spiritual, intellectual and moral capacities of human race. The relationship between God and man is fostered through prayer, knowledge of scriptures revealed by these teachers, love for

God, moral self-discipline, and service to humanity. One benefit of cultivating a spiritual life is that the individual increasingly develops those innate qualities that lie at the foundation of human happiness and social progress. The coming of each new Prophet marks a pivotal point in time. Each releases a fresh spiritual impulse, stimulating personal renewal and social advancement. Arguably, these two great Prophets Basaveśvara and Rāmalinga swāmi who made their appearance at long intervals never wholly succeeded in reforming humanity. These mystics/messengers have a twofold station. On the one hand, they were divine beings, reflecting perfectly God's will. On the other hand, they were humans, subject to birth, suffering and death. They have had distinct physical identities and they addressed humanity at particular stages. These differences give rise to cultural distinctions between sects that sometimes conceal their inherent unity. Fundamentally, however, the message has been the same. Each has stressed the importance of love for God, obedience to His will and love for humanity. Although the words have varied, each has taught that individuals should treat others as they would like to be treated themselves. But, the fact is that men with their innate propensities for evil as for good are not completely transformed despite their respective sincere attempt. But, the influence of these supermen of light descends upon humanity like a benediction and a number of individuals shape their lives in the light emitted by them. Perhaps, they might be failed in their attempt but they are still remembered even today in their respective region for their spiritual awakening with the message of social harmony viz.. "Love and Compassion" to wean men from their inequities and thereby showing an eternal path to the humankind.

Notes

- * Pon. Sourirajan, *A Critical Study of Saint Tāyumanāvar*, Sri Venkateswara University, Tirupati, 1978, p. 252.
1. Please refer to the explanation note of the foot no. 5 of the Chapter - 3, *Tamil Siddhas and Vīraśaiva Śaraṇas: Souls Searching for Ultimate Reality and Heavenly Bliss*.
 2. **Void:** According to *Vīraśaivism*, God is both form and formless. Basavaṇṇa is often described as *shūnya* i.e. 'void' which is another name for *pūrṇa* - 'infinite'.
 3. **Nātha Sampradāya:** *Nātha Sampradāya* of North India revolted against the rigid religious order then existing. The term *nātha*, in its theological sense, is restricted to a Śaiva preceptor just as the surname of *gosain* is confined to the teachers of the Vaiṣṇava faith. It is derived from the Prākṛit word *nātha* meaning the nose-string used for controlling an animal. This term probably has been adopted by the Siddhas to refer to one who has controlled his mind through *yoga*. ... The term *nātha* is very interesting and is subtly related to the cosmic view of the Tamil Siddhas. There are two syllables '*nā*' and '*tha*' in the term. The '*nā*' is said to represent the unmanifest cosmic spirit and '*tha*' symbolizes the manifest universe. A *nātha* is a person who understands and harmonizes the two polarities of the 'unmanifest' and the 'manifest'.

Nāthas wanted that the doors of *kaivalya* should be open to one and all irrespective of their sex or caste. Women also occupied an important place among *nāthas*. They preached their philosophy through the speech of common man. The *nāthas* were Śaivites. *Nātha Sampradāya* accepted the principles of *Yōga* and assimilated a number of concepts of the *Buddhist tāntriks*, *jñāna* and *advaita vāda* from the *upaniṣads*, on the one hand, and *Bhakti* on the other. The followers of the sect trace their preceptor directly to Sankara himself. Though the *nātham mata* accepts only nine *nāthas* in theory, their numbers is infinite in reality. The following is the chronological order of the important *Nāthas* – Ādinātha, Machīndranātha (Matsyendranātha), Gōrakhanātha, Gahininātha (Gowninātha), Nivrittinātha, Jñānanātha, Jalundharanātha, Chowranginātha and Kānfinātha (See for more

details: T.N. Ganapathy, *The Philosophy of the Tamil Siddhas*, pp. 22 and 204).

4. **Ṣaṭsthala Siddhānta**: Please refer to the foot no. 5 of the chapter 3, *Tamil Siddhas and Vīraśaiva Śaraṇas: Souls Searching for Ultimate Reality and Heavenly Bliss*.
5. The observation of A. Sunderaraj Theadore appeared in the preface of the book *Thus Spake Basava*, Basava Samiti, Bangalore, 1965, p. 11.

Chapter – 5

Re-organization of Bhakti Movement: The Cult of ‘Vallālār’ Rāmalinga swāmi*

O my father! This is my appeal. Please hear and grant it to me. I must love all living beings and serve them. I must traverse the length and breadth of the entire world and proclaim your glory and grace. I must wield the sceptre of your gracious light so that the true path of *Sanmārgam* which occupies an ineffably supreme position, may flourish everywhere. You must also forgive me, if I commit any mistake, unaware, in my enthusiasm; and grant me that state of inseparable union with You, my Lord.

- ‘Vallālār’ Rāmalinga swāmi, *Tiru-Arutiṭṭā* 4079

History, strangely at sometimes, repeats similar events and incidents at different times and places too. Different people getting engaged in similar kind of actions for similar causes at different times and places are a pattern of history. This must have occurred at countless times in the bygone years when the so similar socio-religious and political situations prevailed at different places and periods that required them so. The present study attempts to analyze how the **Bhakti Movement** originally emerged in Tamil Nadu during the 6th century A.D. and how it again re-emerged by consolidating its position during the 19th century A.D. too.

In a well-known purāṇic passage it is stated that *Bhakti* was “born in the Tamil country and attained maturity in Karnataka. Afterwards, she gained some respect in Maharashtra and reached old age in Gujarat, before being born again in Vrindāvan”, the village in the North where Kṛṣṇa passed his youth (*Bhāgavata-Māhātmya* 43–50; cf. *Padma Purāṇa* 6. 189–90). These legendary wandering of a personified *Bhakti* correspond roughly to the historical spread of *Bhakti* from Tamil Nadu to the Deccan and thence to the North and East. Though the Bhakti Movement lost its vigour and strength after 10th century A.D. in Tamil Nadu, somehow it managed to stretch its life even up to 19th century A.D. through some spiritual beings. As stated elsewhere, “One of the most striking features of modern religious movements is the way they situate themselves in a line going back untold ages, yet give themselves the freedom to depart from tradition when modern circumstances require it. The most revolutionary departures are justified by appeal to ancient scriptures. Mystics who start movements often claim this sort of continuity with the past and do not hesitate to quote from scripture to justify their innovations; but they also claim another source of authority. Their own inner experience gives them the freedom to innovate” (Peter Heehs 2002: 416).

By overall, the Bhakti movements of ancient and modern periods have a Universal appeal. As such, the movements were open to all, irrespective of caste, creed, sex, language and religion, status of being literate and illiterate, etc. They were a consolation open to all. They emphasized people to believe in God that will save them from all miseries. The movements in their attempts to unite all castes and communities for the Universal happiness under the unique emotional attachment or fervent devotion to deity are called **Bhakti**.¹ There is an interesting recurring feature to be noticed in the history of Religious movements in Tamil Nadu, at the two ends of its historical continuum. In the first case, Bhakti

movement emerged as a sort of counteraction to the then existing two religions, viz. Buddhism and Jainism. It was some *Nāyaṇmārs*² of Śaivism and *Ālvārs*³ of Vaishṇavism during the 6th century A.D. and Saint Rāmalinga swāmi (Reverently addressed as *Vaḷḷalār*, i.e. 'Philanthropist') during the 19th century A.D. who led the movements against the religious dogmatism, of course in challenging the different religions, namely Buddhism and Jainism in the case of the former and Christianity and Islam in the case of latter.

As viewed by Prof. P. Marudanayagam: "*Bhakti*, as it was felt, understood and preached by these souls, was neither naive emotionalism nor sophisticated intellectual love for God or blind superstitious ritual-ridden worship but a harmonious expression of cognition, conation and feeling. It is the intense universal love which primarily manifests itself in service for fellow-human beings in every one of whom the vision of God is revealed. The *bhakta* is called *aḍiyāṇ* or *tonḍaṇ*, one who serves, and his life is one of total surrender to God, dedicated to the service of man."⁴ The emergence and spread of the movements created active cultural links among the various people, by cutting across the political boundaries of different kingdoms. At both the times, a new wave was created among the masses by which people became socially conscious of their Tamil heritage. In fact, the Bhakti movement represents primarily a religious phenomenon with a valuable social content against the Vedic religion, especially for its rigid ritualism and sectarian philosophy. The movements taught us some aspects of social change, equality, brotherhood, fraternity, unity in diversity, morality, religious tolerance, social services, love for all living beings, purity of heart and mind, respect to elders, equality of man and woman, and so on.

The origin and development of Bhakti movement, as put it by Cinnathambi (1994: 8): "It is the warp and woof of popular in Hinduism. It stimulates the human beings. ... From the historical point

of view, the concept of Bhakti movement was well developed day by day. The storm, the thunder-sky, the rain, the snake, the fire, the cruel animals, *etc.* were worshipped by primitive people. These were also obstacles and threatening to their livelihood in those days. So they had lived in different kinds of caves and trees. In course of time, these were adored by them. So we may imagine that bhakti or devotion evolved out of fear or desire.” Before the spread of Buddhism and Jainism into Tamil Nadu, there was a religion worshipping Śiva (in *Linga* form), Viṣṇu, Korravai (Kāli), and Murugaṇ. The Aryans, who had originally hailed from central Asia, migrated to Tamil Nadu after the Vedic period around 300 B.C. and subsequently the process of *Aryanisation* followed. Naturally, they believed in worship of many gods like Indra, Varuṇa, Agni, Sūrya, and others (besides Śiva and Viṣṇu) some of whom are undoubtedly personifications of the forces of nature. In course of time, they embodied these gods in a new order. They preached the rules and regulations to be followed in worship, which became rigid in course of time. Since the rites and ceremonies covered almost the entire life of a person from birth to death, the help of the priest was required at every stage. Obviously, the priest had become very dominant and was respected. By the 6th century B.C. there was degeneration in their spiritual way of simple and austere life. The Brahmins divided the people in the name of God and worship. The performance of various rites and ceremonies became rigid. Their simple and austere life became worldly to the extent of competing with the ruling class for political power. The spirit of freedom and creativity had almost become extinct from the society. Sacrifices involving the killing of animals were much in vogue and were performed with the object of gaining prosperity and success in the life; and heavenly bliss after the death. The Brahmins used Sanskrit, a language that the common man could not understand,

exclusively for these rituals and ceremonies. Thus, there was a general disintegration in values and the life of the people.

Existence of Buddhism and Jainism (c. 600 B.C.–A.D. 600)

After the Sangam Age (c. A.D. 200–200 B.C.), the Kalabhras overran the whole of South India and under their royal patronage, Buddhism and Jainism began to flourish in the Tamil country. Kāñcīpuram of Toṇḍai Region and Kāvērippūmpattīṇam of Cōḷa Region served as the two great seats of learning of both Buddha and Jaina theologies during the period A.D. 300–600. Naturally, Buddhism and Jainism had found fault with the Vedic religion on many accounts. These religions attracted the masses by appealing to logic and reason and began to make rapid stride in Tamil Nadu. Both the religions emerged from the same social, intellectual and spiritual milieu of north India as they renounced comfortable lives in order to find release from the impermanence and suffering of existence. In the social milieu of Brahminic domination where the meaning of worship and spiritual life was due to ritualistic nature of worship, **Buddha** ('Enlightened One', 563–480 B.C.) and **Mahāvīra** ('Great Warrior' or 'Excellent Soldier', 599–527 B.C.) revolted against this meaningless, ritualistic religion of the Brahmins. They were aware of the condition of illiterate mass, who were not able to understand the abstract Hindu philosophical and religious concepts. Even literate mass were not able to understand the Sanskrit texts concerned with religion and philosophy. So Buddha ridiculed people who followed this degenerated religion and showed them the new path of ethical religion called the '**Middle Path**' between self-indulgence and self-defeating austerity to attain '**Nirvāṇa**' or '**Salvation**' (Freedom from the birth cycle). His philosophy is not faith based. He does not ask you to believe in God. Buddha did not talk about God. "He broke the monopoly of religious knowledge

held by the Brahmins by declaring that every individual was to do his own religious seeking, and should not depend upon any outside authority. He tore down the power of tradition by (i) admitting all classes of persons, from the highest to the lowest, to the Order of Monks or *Sangha* established by him, (ii) not barring anyone on the ground of sex or caste, and (iii) discarding the use of Sanskrit as the language of religion. He preached in Pāli, the dialect of the people of Bihar... The religion he gave to the people was devoid of all ritual, sacrifices, authority, priesthood and also of a futile metaphysical controversy and speculation” (Suda 1978: 149). He was not satisfied in the speculation of the existence of God, the immortality of soul, the creation or annihilation of the world, and in extreme asceticism. He emphasized that neither indulgence nor deprivation is conducive to spiritual life. Hence, in his quest for truth, he discovered the middle path between the two extremes of asceticism and worldly pleasures, which he propagated all through his life with all eagerness.

Buddha preached that **the desire for personal gratification was the root cause of all sorrows in the world and that the only way to end sorrow was to extinguish all selfish desires**. When a person extinguishes his/her selfish desires, there would be a definite way to eternal peace. Since suffering is born of craving, the way to eliminate suffering is to eliminate craving. And the way to this is to follow the Buddha’s Eightfold Path: (1) Right understanding, (2) Right resolve, (3) Right speech, (4) Right action, (5) Right livelihood, (6) Right effort, (7) Right mindfulness, and (8) Right meditation. The Buddha summed up these teachings in the Four Noble Truths: (1) Existence is suffering, (2) Suffering is caused by craving, (3) There is a means by which craving can be eliminated, and (4) This means is the Noble Eightfold Path. When one has succeeded in eradicating craving in all its forms, one achieves the state that Buddha achieved at Bodh Gaya: *Nibbāna i.e.*

Nirvāṇa. The simplicity and nobility of his doctrines and the spirit of discipline were certainly better calculated to make an appeal to the people than the empty ritualism and ceremonialism of the existing Brahminism and the sacrifices which often involved the killing of animals which it fostered once. His personal compassion and carrying the message of love and peace, from place to place had given a definite hope to the suffering humanity. Gradually, his religion in due course of time became open to one and all. Under the royal patronization and with the association of King Ashoka (304–232 B.C.), Buddhism reached the Tamil country and Sri Lanka. It was well received and nurtured by the kings who have ruled the Tamil country at that time.

Around the same time, Mahāvīra founded Jainism, with almost similar doctrines to that of Buddhism. Jainism took Reality to be a multiple, comprising two main kinds of objects: the *Jīvas* (Souls) and the *Ajīvas* (Non-souls). **Jainism did not believe in the existence of a Creator.** Instead, it believed in the existence of perfected souls abiding in the highest region of the world with fully developed consciousness. It gave much importance to *karma* theory. To escape from the bondage of birth and death, it advocated, the *jīva* should control his sense of material life and develop spiritualized austere life. According to them, life was full of misery and to get rid of the cycle of birth and death was spiritual emancipation or perfection. Their attitude towards life and the world was quite different from that of the Vedic priests who believed that human welfare and even the existence of the world depended upon the utter mercy of the deities whose favour could be sought through sacrificial rites and rituals. It gave emphasis on non-killing and non-consumption of meat. Jainism believed that all potentialities are inherent in man. Man is latently divine and has the capacity to uplift himself to divinity and rise to the highest stage of spiritual development. They did not have desire for long life, good

food and drink, wealth, power, and heroic progeny which were the ideals of human life preached by the Vedic priests. Instead, **they believed in renunciation and abandonment of all worldly pleasures.** Several kings of Tamil Nadu who ruled the land between A.D. 300 and 600 did become champions in popularizing these ideals among the people and they even erected many Jaina temples.

But at the end of A.D. 600, Buddha's principle: "Desire for what will not be attained ends in frustration; therefore, to avoid frustration, avoid desiring what will not be attained", had gone into the deaf-ear of people, as it was practically not possible for a common man to follow in his worldly life. Similarly, the Five Ethical Principles such as *Ahimsa* (Non-violence), *Satya* (Truth), *Asteya* (Non-stealing), *Brahmacarya* (Celibacy) and *Aparigraha* (Non-possession) prescribed by Mahāvīra to his followers have lost their importance among people, as people were unable to adhere to them strictly. 'Any one seeking to transcend the tight complacencies of his community must break away from the religious congregation by becoming a monk thereby releasing from human bondages', such precepts and preaching of rigorous discipline in one's personal life, giving an emphasis on the disciplining of senses through fasting, rejection of fine arts such as music and dance in the scheme of worshipping, thereby giving more importance to renunciation and a total rejection of pleasures by these two religions made people to look for other religion, suitable to their taste and way of life. Moreover, their revolt against ritual, speculation of mystery and belief in a personal god, all these elements proved to be attractive only for a short duration. After the death of Buddha, Buddhism started worshipping him as the God, the cause for which Buddha fought vehemently. In time, differences in interpretation and practice emerged in both Buddhism and Jainism. This led to the formation of various schools differing on various issues. After

the deaths of Buddha and Mahāvīra, there arose different sects like *Mahāyāna*, *Hīnayāna* and *Vajrayāna* in Buddhism⁵ and *Dīgambaras* and *Svetāmbaras* in Jainism⁶ respectively with the differences of opinions on some matter or other. So, these religions known for their pessimistic views on life started to lose their original base and primary charm among the people, in due course of time by the early 6th century A.D.

The Bhakti Movement (c. A.D. 600–900)

During the 3rd century A.D. the Kalabhras of Andhra Pradesh, who came via Karnataka took control of the rule in Tamil Nadu from Pāṇḍiyas and Pallavas (who were then ruling the South and the Northern parts of Tamil Nadu respectively called *Teṇ-Pāṇḍic-Cīmai* and *Toṇḍai Nāḍu*). As the invaders' mother-tongue was not Tamil, there was no encouragement for the overall growth of Tamil culture, religious sentiment, *etc.* For nearly three centuries *i.e.* between 3rd and 5th centuries, Tamils witnessed an eclipse in their way of life, religious sentiments, culture, *etc.* although the period produced some important ethical works like *Tirukkuraḷ*. The fag end of the fifth century started witnessing the decline of Buddhism and the gradual ascendancy of Jainism in Tamil Nadu for various reasons. "In this time or very soon after there arose a strong reaction against the growing influence of Jainism and Buddhism, which found expression in a widespread Bhakti movement among the worshippers of Śiva and Viṣṇu; the leaders of this movement were known as *Nāyaṇārs* (*Nāyaṇmārs*) and *Ālvārs* and their exuberant devotional songs, gathered later in the collections known as the *Tēvāram* and *Divyaṇ prabandham*, celebrate every orthodox shrine they visited propagandist peregrinations, and constitute the most priceless treasure in all Tamil literature" (Sastri 1975: 4–5). The *Nāyaṇmārs* and *Ālvārs* traveled across Tamil Nadu from temple to

temple singing the glory of their presiding deities in soul- stirring songs in order to speak for their respective sects. The great *Nāyaṇmārs* like Tirumūlar, Kāraikkāl Ammaiyār, Tirujñānasambandar, Tirunāvukkarasar, Sundarar, and Māṇikkavāsagar and the great *Ālvārs* like Poygai Ālvār, Pēy Ālvār, Bhūdam Ālvār were the early Vaishṇava saint poets who propagated the Bhakti movement in Tamil country. “They felt the call to stem the rising tide of heresy. The growth on the one hand, of an intense emotional *Bhakti* or Devotion to Śiva and Viṣṇu and on the other, of an out-spoken hatred of Buddhists and Jains, were the chief characteristics of the new epoch. Calling for public debate, competing in the performance of miracles and testing the truth of the doctrines by means of ordeals, became the order of the day” (*Ibid.*, p. 423). The tireless efforts put forward by the great *Nāyaṇmārs* and *Ālvārs* for the common man’s interest had actually created a wave of religious enthusiasm for Śaivism and Vaishṇavism and brought the dividends in the early part of the 7th century and that is referred to as the Bhakti movement in Tamil Nadu. Originally, the Bhakti movement was open to men and women of all castes, thereby questioning the then existing social system in which Brahmins and their language Sanskrit were regarded in high esteem. The movement was implicitly revolutionary and in some cases actively anti-establishment.

The Śaiva saints advocated four main paths of Śaivism⁷, viz. the paths of *carya*, *kriya*, *yoga*, and *jñāna*, otherwise known as *dāsa mārga*, *satputra mārga*, *saha mārga* and *san mārga* i.e. ‘the path of the servant, the path of the good son, the path of the friend and good path or true path’. These paths are respectively represented by Tirunāvukkarasar, Tirujñānasambandar, Sundarar, and Māṇikkavāsagar. The *Ālvārs* were generally known for their path of *jñāna mārga*. According to the *Ālvārs*, *Bhakti* is love for love, superior absolute, unconditioned and eternal. In their mission of

rooting out the *ahamkār* and spreading the Bhakti cult, the *Nāyaṇmārs* and *Ālvārs* used their powerful heart-stirring devotional songs and pilgrimages to temples of their personal gods, and thus popularized the movement, thereby restricting the spread of Buddhism and Jainism in Tamil Nadu. These devotional souls used the art forums like dance, drama and music to spread the Bhakti cult in the country. “In Buddhism and Jainism, the liberation of the individual from the fetters of ‘human bondage’ was achieved by total denial and renunciation. In *Bhakti*, it is achieved by total devotion and worship. The liberation of individual from the grip of social oppression was achieved; society as such became an enemy of the individual. And these two religions – at least in their later ‘degenerate’ forms in the south – were indeed strongly antisocial. In spite of the rivalry between each other, they were strong enough to be very probably a powerful antisocial factor in the Tamil Society in the middle of the first millennium A.D. That is one of the reasons why, in the second half of the 1st millennium, the society and in particular its rulers turned away from Jainism and Buddhism” (Zvelebil 1973: 195).

According to Bhakti movement, leading family life and performing a vocation were not obstacles to the realization of the supreme. The *Nāyaṇmārs* in their life made it clear that the austere ways of Jains and Buddhists were not necessary for attaining *mokṣa*. The saint poets categorically emphasized that the mind must be imbued with the spirit of God. The requirement of *Śiva Bhakti* is to do service to God as well as to followers of Śaivism. As a result of this pragmatic view of the worldly life, the Bhakti movement helped the temples to emerge as the popularizing centres of all fine arts. The organization of collective worship and festivals in honour of the God also popularized Śaivism and in consequence the two religions of Jainism and Buddhism became weak and lost the large following they had prior to the 7th century

A.D. (Rajalakshmi 1994: 39). “With their cult of pilgrimage and propaganda combined with the winning magnetism of their personalities, the *Nāyaṇmārs* by and large succeeded in routing the Buddhists and Jainas of their day. The Pallava King Mahendra Varmaṇ (A.D. 600–650) and the Pāṇḍiya King Niṇṇacīr Neḍumāraṇ (A.D. 650–700) who supported the Jainas and caused suffering initially to Appar and Sambandar respectively, were converted to the faith of Śivaṇ. The Tamil land thus, became ‘completely safe for Śaivism in the seventh century’ (Ayyangar 1981: 32). K. Kailasapathy (1978: 91) viewed the emergence of Bhakti movement in his own way of Marxist approach, this fighting between Śaivism and Buddhism & Jainism as an economic conflict between Śaivite agricultural classes and Jain Merchants.

Though the Bhakti movement had its own disagreement with Jainism and Buddhism on many issues, it took some important elements from them as such, kindness to all living beings, non-killing of animals in worshipping, elimination of caste and sex barriers, and stress on ethical conduct. Among the Bhakti saints, there were some from lower stratum of the society like Tiruṇālaipōvār from *Paraiah* (*Harijan*) community; Kaṇṇappa Nāyaṇār from Hunter community; Tiruppāṇ Ālvār from *Pāṇar* (Minstrels) community and Kāraikkāl Ammaiyār and Āṇḍāl even from women too.

In course of time, the strength and vigour of the Bhakti movement receded, mainly after the 9th century due to several factors especially because of upper hand of religious leaders who had controlled day-to-day life of people. “It was a time when the caste system had had a wide social acceptance and the low-caste people were treated as slaves. Religion became more and more institutionalized and authoritarian in nature and sectarian in outlook. Rigid dogmas were established, religious rules came into being and one could not but bow down before the Tables of Law. And people blindly followed religion by social habit in order not to get into the

bad books of others. Rituals and ceremonies were rampant. Too many saints and seers paved the way for various systems of intellectual philosophy, which only divided the people into rival groups. Since each group spent much of its time in defending itself against its rival ones in matters relating to sectarian religion and philosophy, the genuine moral and spiritual values were ignored. The fanatics were not in a position to understand that “the knowledge of God is not to be gained by weighing the feeble arguments of reason for or against this existence; it is to be gained only by a self-transcending and absolute consecration aspiration and experience” (Raja, *Ibid.*, p. 333). Thus, there arose **Siddha Tradition** (c. A.D. 1000–1500) against this domination of religion and social order. However, though Bhakti movement as creative poetry had ceased, the *Acharyas*, the commentators continued with their work of re-interpretation and writing of commentaries on the earlier *Bhakti* texts.

Siddha Tradition (c. A.D. 1000–1500)

In the later part of the history of Śaivism in Tamil Nadu, the Siddhas (*Cittar* in Tamil) had an important role to play. The Siddhas were people who were bestowed with *Siddhis* or extraordinary powers. Here, *Siddhi* means ‘Realization’, or ‘Final Liberation’. There is no English equivalent word which can bring out the full significance of the term *Siddha*. “A Siddha is a deathless being, a *nirvāṇized* human being who has attained complete freedom – a state where there is cessation of sorrows, sufferings and fear of death, a state of perfect peace, perfect knowledge and infinite freedom” (Ganapathy, *Op.cit.*, p. 20). In short, we can say, a Siddha is a *yogin* who has attained various supernatural powers, one who has realized Śiva in himself, one who has transformed himself into Śiva.

Contrary to the Bhakti tradition, though Siddhas in general utter Śiva or *Civam* in their verses, the word arguably does not only stand for the personal God Śiva. The recurrent usage of the word *Civam* by the Siddhas actually means an 'Abstract Supreme Being' rather than the personal God Śiva. The word *Civam* is an abstract noun meaning 'Goodness', 'Auspiciousness' and 'the Highest state of God', in which 'He exists as Pure Intelligence'. Understandably, the Siddhas in their verses used the word *Civam* instead of *Civan*, the word denoting the noun of God Śiva. Obviously, no genuine Siddha in Tamil Nadu, including Tirumūlar has sung in praise of any local God or personal deity. Tirumūlar as a Siddha departs from the practice of the great religious saints of Tamil Nadu, *i.e.* the *Nāyaṇmārs* and the *Ālvārs* of the popular Bhakti cult. He does not seem to have sung poems in praise of the Gods of temples. He does not generally refer to individual temples or worship in such temples of *mūrtis* or idols through *mantras* and *āgamic* rituals, as temples and idols are necessary for ordinary people but not for Siddhas. This is a very significant feature of Siddha cult prevailed in Tamil Nadu pre and post period of Bhakti Movement *i.e.* c. A.D. 600–900.

Śivavākkīyar, a foremost rebellion Siddha severely condemns the practice of the idol worship and ridicules people going to temples for worshipping their deity. "Because of ignorance people go in search of the God in 'seas and mountains', not knowing that the *jīva* as representing the Ultimate in Oneself, is Śivam (hymn 476), thus he worries for the people's non-awareness. Subsequently, he questions the stupidity of people by asking, "Should Gods become stones?" (*Śivavākkīyar*, hymn 126). "Why should you garland a stone god and go around a planted stone all the time reciting *mantras*? How do you expect the stone to speak when that God himself is within you?" (*Ibid.*, 81). He wonders how people make a distinction between two types of stones, one fit for idol of

God and another for the doorstep (*Ibid.*, 411). Along with the condemnation of idol worship the Siddha Śivavākkiyar criticizes lock, stock and barrel all rituals, ceremonies, festivals, pilgrimages, bathing in sacred rivers, etc. He raises a pertinent question: “How can we do *pūja* to one which is beyond all formalities?” (*Ibid.*, 32). He also asks: “Is floral *pūja* the real one?” (*Ibid.*, 481). He also discards the very important concept of personal God of Bhakti movement, “There cannot be a personal God for me and a personal god for you because it will lead to two Gods” (*Ibid.*, 128). There is no ‘particular God’ (*Tirumandiram* (TMM) 109), thus emphatically Tirumūlar (c. A.D. 500) puts forward a view of Siddhas. Further in this regard, he states: The ignorant people speak of ‘this or that God’ (*Ibid.*, 105 and 1154); and those who speak of this one God as Śiva, Viṣṇu, and Brahma are nothing but prattling (*Ibid.*, 110). Strikingly, contrary to the Bhakti tradition, which emphasized passionate devotion to God, Siddha tradition emphasized true knowledge, *yoga* practice, moral behaviour and realizing the spiritual being. “The Siddhas take note of the fact of duality operating in our day-to-day life and suggest the method of *yoga* coupled with *jñāna* for achieving the goal of oneness. There is, for example, the duality of male and female, of Śiva and Śakti, in the Hindu *tantra* tradition. The aim of the *yogin* is to transcend this duality and attain oneness with Śiva” (Balasubramanian, *Ibid.*).

Siddhas were the enlightened souls who denounced idol and ritualistic worship and petitionary prayers as fetters holding back the soul from liberation (Ganapathy, *Op.cit.*, p. 6). In their scheme of things, ‘Liberation’ (*Mukti*) in contrast to *Bhakti* is achieved through knowledge and *yoga* i.e. Entasis (*Samādhi*). As stated before elsewhere (in the chapter-3, *Tamil Siddhas and Viraśaiva Śaraṇas: Souls Searching for Ultimate Reality and Heavenly Bliss*), the Siddha like Tirumūlar clearly emphasizes the vital role of the human body for the realization of spiritual happiness. He says that

he had mistakenly believed the body to be imperfect but later on realized that within it resides the Ultimate Reality (*TMM* 705). Being ignorant of the fact that God resides in the human body, many people go in search of Him throughout the countries of the world except in the body (*Ibid.*, 2071). He condemns people who do not 'see' the God in their bodies as sinners (*Ibid.*, 1828). He just reveals the reasons to foster the body at any cost and protect it from mere mortality.

If body is destroyed, soul is destroyed
And one will not attain true powerful knowledge
Having acquired the skill to foster the body
I cherished the body and I fostered the soul
(*Tirumandiram* 704, Tr. Kamil Zvelebil)

To achieve realization, the Siddhas warn people not to take rest in half-way houses like caste, scriptures, *pūjas*, etc. According to the Siddhas, the cause of the prevalence of delusion in our lives is institutional rather than personal. Therefore, they vehemently criticized the then prevailing beliefs and practices of Hindu social system and thought. In fact, Siddhas were the first ones, who vehemently raised their voice against the discrimination of caste and creed in worshipping. "What is caste?", asks Śivavākkiyar (*ŚVR*, hymn 47). "We will set fire to the disgusting caste system", thus roars Pāmbāṭṭic cittar, as he was angry with the prevailing caste hierarchal system (hymn 123). "O when the day of living with no caste distinctions will come", thus worries Bhadragiriyār (hymn 126). *Vālmīgar Jñānam* says that caste is a cunning device for earning one's livelihood (hymn 8). Śivavākkiyar vehemently rebukes the heinous practice of untouchability and upholders of caste system. He questions whether the bones, flesh and skin of *paṇatti* (a Brahmin woman) and those of a *paraiya* (*Harijan*) woman with reference to the above are distinguishable on the basis

of caste? He angrily asks: Are they numbered ... on the basis of their castes? (ŚVR, hymn 35). He is the foremost Siddha who questioned the supremacy of Brahmins and condemned their scriptures tooth and nail. Considerably, Siddhas maintained a common view that all the śāstras are mere waste (*Pāmbāṭṭic cittar*, hymn 98) and useless to people.

For such reasons, as stated by T.N. Ganapathy, many people thought that the Siddhas were Buddhists in disguise, since Buddhism also criticized vehemently the doctrines of Hindus⁸. It needs to be mentioned here that similar to the Siddhas of Tamil Nadu, there were *Nāthamuṇis*⁹ in the northern parts of India, who have many similar characteristics. As observed by T.N. Ganapathy in his book, *The Philosophy of the Tamil Siddhas* (p. 204): “in many respects the *Sūfis* appear to have been similar to the Tamil Siddhas. The term ‘*sūfi*’ means literally ‘woollen’ and by extension, ‘wearer of wools’. It is well-known that woolen dress is associated with spirituality, and we have one Tamil Siddha by name Kailāya Kambaḷic caṭṭaimuni. One will be struck with wonder at the exact terms used by both Kabir and Śivavākkiyar. ‘Once a ripe fruit falls it won’t jump back to the branch’¹⁰ (ŚVR, hymn 43).

We find Kaḍuveḷic cittar in Kabir when he sings:

This body is a jar of unbroken clay,
Taken with one on a journey.
At the first knock it smashed into pieces,
And nothing remained in the hand.¹¹

There is a close relation between the Tamil Siddhas and the Zen mystics in that both reject anything that has a semblance of an external authority (Ganapathy, *Op.cit.*, p. 204). Like their counterparts of North India, Siddhas of Tamil Nadu too had the agnomen of ‘Siddha’ (as that of ‘*Nātha*’) added to their proper names. “The

Siddhas have no sacred city, no monastic organization, no religious instruments. They are distinguished by their indifference to formal religion. Their philosophy is enlightenment as distinct from doctrine; it is not a theoretical and formalist approach to problems. The Tamil Siddhas are not system builders; their whole technique is to jolt people out of their intellectual ruts and their conventional, barren, morality. They make fun of logic and metaphysics. They turn orthodox philosophy upside down in order to make it look absurd. They are the ‘untethered’ non-conformist, spiritual aspirants, yearning for a direct and natural approach to, and a more intense experience of, the absolute truth” (*Ibid.*, p. 5). Though the Siddhas were scantily respected in their times for obvious reasons (cited earlier), their popularity in Tamil society was so much that one can not brush it aside. We hear lot of their hymns were being sung often even by illiterates today and their system of medicine known as *Siddha Vaidya* is the most sought treatment system (particularly now as the allopathic medicines fail to cure some diseases permanently) all over Tamil Nadu, for its effectiveness as the medicines are made out of natural herbs and other things. It is to be noted here: “To denounce today caste, worship in temples and religious and *āgamic* rituals does not require much courage, but to have done so in the centuries in which the Tamil Siddhas lived required extraordinary heroism and strength of conviction” (Iyer 1969: 82).

(For more details on Siddhas, please refer to the relevant portions in the Chapter – 3 entitled, *Tamil Siddhas and Vīraśaiva Śaraṇas: Souls Searching for Ultimate Reality and Heavenly Bliss*).

Tāyumāṇava swāmi (A.D. 1604–1661)

In the Siddha Tradition, the next pious soul who came on the scene and preached the noble ideas of universal faith was **Tāyumāṇava swāmi** (1604–1661). At Vēdāraṇyam in the south of Tanjāvūr

District, Tamil Nadu, there was a gentleman named Kēḍiliyappa Pillai who belonged to the *Veḷḷāḷa* (Agricultural) community. He was once in the service of a temple which was under the control of a *Śaiva Muṭṭ* and later on out of his pious nature, he became *Periya Sampirati* (Chief Accountant) in the royal of kingdom of Muttu Krishṇappa Nāyakkar (1601–1609), who was ruling then from Tiruchirāppalli. Kēḍiliyappa Pillai had given his first son Śiva-chidambaram in adoption to his elder brother Vēdāranya Pillai, who was childless. There upon, as he himself became childless, he prayed earnestly to Lord Śiva at Tiruchirāppalli who is known as God Tāyumaṇavar for a son. “This prayer was granted and Kēḍiliyappa Pillai’s wife Gajavalli gave birth to a son and the boy was naturally called after the benign deity – Tāyumaṇavar” (Pillai 1981: 117). He was born in the year 1604 (Sourirajan 1978: 17).

When Tāyumaṇavar was born, the political situation of Tamil Nadu was not good, rather it was bad. The local chieftains of Tamil Nadu were often quarrelling among themselves, and the East India companies of the European countries, not being content with trade and profit, were interfering in local politics and were adding to the existing confusion. Though Apostle Thomas – one of the twelve disciples of Jesus Christ, landed in Tamil Nadu as early as A.D. 52, Christianity did not spread as a dominant religion till the 16th century A.D. It was in the time of Robert De Nobili (1577–1656), who adopted the dressing and other cultural habits of the native Brahmins, attracted people and converted some of them into Christianity.

Tāyumaṇavar naturally had the good fortune of having a sound education both in Tamil *āgamas* and Sanskrit *śāstras* and mastered three languages – Tamil, Telugu and Sanskrit, as his father was in royal service. He succeeded his father at his very young age (then he was seventeen years old) to hold the respected and responsible position in the royal ministry of Muttu Vīrappa Nāyakkar I (A.D.

1609–1623, who was the son of Muttu Krishṇappa Nāyakkar (A.D. 1601–1609) of Tiruchirāppaḷli. However, he never got fascinated either with his position or with the worldly life as he was restless owing to his spiritual urges. In fact, he was looking forward for the ‘Realization of God’, despite his duties in the palace. In his early days, he was deeply concerned with different warring schools of philosophy. He was fortunate to meet one *Maṇḍa Guru* (Pious Teacher of Silence) and initiated by him in the line of disciples of the great mystic saint Tirumūlar. As a result, he started to practice *maṇḍa tavam* (Silent Meditation) of ‘*Summā Iru*’ (‘Be Still’) advised by his guru for hours together and in the process he attained great spiritual heights. Later, he acquired the power of reconciliation of various schools of thought and sincerely felt the need of a unique faith meant for all people. ‘With the blessings of the *maṇḍa guru*, Tāyumāṇavar came to the conviction that the *Vaidika Caiva Cuttādvaita Ciddhāntam* (Pure Non-dualistic Ultimate Reality of Vedic Śaivism) is the only true path and Lord Śiva mentioned therein is the ultimate Reality and to merge with Him is the *Attuvita Mukti* (Sourirajan 1978: 11). After getting the first *dīkṣa* from his *maṇḍa guru*, he relinquished his post as well as his family life and proceeded on pilgrimage towards south. At a place called Virālimalai (located at twenty miles away from Tiruchirāppaḷli), the saint happened to stay for a while and there upon he came to meet some *Cittars*, who eventually transformed him into fully spiritually developed one. After some time, Tāyumāṇavar proceeded to Rāmeśvaram and tried to settle there permanently. However, knowing the spiritual development of Tāyumāṇavar, his kith and kin reached the place soon and persuaded him to enter the duties of the married life. Tāyumāṇavar in a way agreed to their request as he was reminded of the command of his *guru* to lead a family life for some time before entering the spiritual one. Accordingly, he married a girl named Maṭṭuvār Kuḷali, probably in the year A.D. 1628 at the age of

twenty four. No doubt his family life was one of great happiness, and he was blessed to have a son namely Kaṇaga Sabhāpati Piḷḷai. But, a few years later Tāyumāṇavar lost his wife and his mother. These events only strengthened his earlier spiritual conviction of the transitory nature of life, and were largely responsible for his breaking away all the earthly ties. He handed over his son, wealth and property to his only brother Śivachidambaram Piḷḷai and fully focused all his attention dedicating his all his time and energy to the realization of god. After a while, his guru, who realized the mental state of his disciple, performed the *nirvāṇa dīkṣa* and granted him the ascetic status. He also performed *jñānopadesa*. He started staying in the *Maṇḍa Guru Muṭṭ* of Tiruchirāppaḷi. After his guru passed away, he became the head of the *muṭṭ* in A.D. 1644. However he did not remain there for long. He went on pilgrimage to the southern parts of India visiting the various sacred places of Śiva and at last reached Rāmanāthapuram. He chose a place called Kāṭṭūraṇi situated two miles away from Rāmanāthapuram and continued his spiritual and *yogic* practices under the shade of a tamarind tree. He lived there till his death. It is said that some people set his body on fire thinking that the mystic was dead, when the latter was actually observing deep meditation. The saint felt the heat of fire but silently thanked them for enabling him to join with ‘the divine power of grace’. Thus, the mystic Tāyumāṇavar attained *mukti* in A.D. 1661.

Tāyumāṇavar was a unique mystic in the line of Siddhas who actually became role model for Rāmalinga swāmi (1823–1874), popularly addressed as *Vaḷḷalār* (Philanthropist). Probably, he seems to be the first Siddha who held a respectable post in the royal kingdom and acted as the chief of a *muṭṭ* – a religious assembly meant for spiritual wisdom. He is, no doubt, the first mystic advocating for a unique faith called *Camaraca Cuddha Ciddhāntam* (Universal Faith for Pure Ultimate Reality). According to the

saint, Śaivism is the only system which shows the divine grace to those who seek knowledge by adopting eight *Cittis* (*Siddhis*), to those who perform penance by practicing absolute silence and to those who have attained the pleasures of heaven. This system is the only suitable path and is known as **Canmārgam** (Sourirajan, *Ibid.*, p. 38). It may be mentioned here *Canmārga* is the path representing the path of *jñāna*. In contrast to the essence of Bhakti movement, the former did not emphasis on *Bhakti* but emphasized on *yoga* and ‘Meditation’. He considered that “Heart is the temple; Thoughts are the incense; Love is the holy water to the Almighty in worshipping” (*Parāparakkanni* (PPK), hymn 151). Tāyumāṇavar always emphasized the principles that enlightened people about God and the things that are holy. Though he worshipped Lord Śiva throughout his life, often expressed his conviction that the God is “the One Who is without attributes, beyond all things, and beyond all forms, and beyond cognition” (*Poruḷ Vaṇakkam*, hymn 2). He strongly advocated: “God has neither caste nor family; neither birth nor death; neither bondage nor release; neither form nor formlessness or any name” (*Ibid.*, hymn 5). Further he says: “As He (God) is timeless, He is without any distinction of day or night. There is no limitation or defeat in Him” (*Āgāra Bhuvaṇam*, hymn 20). “Tāyumāṇavar says in *Parāparakkanni* that it is by divine grace that the Lord manifests and governs this earth and other worlds. But being the Absolute, He is above all things material. A mountain of bliss, He is both Immanent and Transcendent. To His devotees He is ever near, knowing their innermost thoughts and wishes and fulfils them by showering His grace. He can be described as the most precious treasure of man or the Highest knowledge we can conceive” (Pillai 1981: 121).

As a passionate lover of all living beings, Tāyumāṇavar seems to be the first Siddha who gave a greater importance to the doctrine of non-killing (of beings) and thereby advocated for ‘Vegeta-

rianism' and *Sanmārga* for the blissful spiritual life (This is what seemed to have impressed much Rāmalinga swāmi who later took it as his prime concern and preached earnestly in his mission throughout the life). One of his (Tāyumāṇavar's) life ambitions was to propagate the gospel of non-killing throughout the world (*PPK*, hymn 54). Not only this, he recognized that the followers of the non-killing are the only good human beings; not others (*Ibid.*, hymn 192). Saint Rāmalinga swāmi later in his days echoed this sentiment elaborately: "Those who do not observe non-killing are aliens; not our relatives, who can merely be fed (as animals) and not associated with" (*Tiru-Aruḷ-Pā (TAP)* 4160). The life prayer of saint Tāyumāṇavar: "O Eternal One! Show me your Divine grace to consider all lives as that of mine" (*PPK*, hymn 65) itself shows how compassionate he was to living beings. Tāyumāṇavar in a way synthesized the doctrines of *Śaiva Siddhānta* and *Vedānta* for the universal faith which he preached till his last moment with great zeal but without any ego. He was so happy and blissful at his personal level for attaining the state of 'stillness' (observing deep meditation with no conscience and attachments). No doubt, he lived the life of a realized soul. But, his spiritual journey arguably didn't bring any remarkable change in the attitude of society, as the people are being ever embedded with the worldly attachments out of their ignorance. Like Siddhas, he also didn't try his luck to propagate his gospel under any forum or institution supported by mass (other than holding the position of Chief of the *muṭṭ* handed over by his *mauṇa guru*), as was in the case of early Bhakti movement. Strikingly, he also aspired for casteless society but never questioned the hegemony of Vedas and Brahmin ideology in day-to-day life of people like Siddhas. Perhaps, his soft and humble nature and quiet stay in deep meditation might not have given room for such out burst and related actions. With all probity, we can say that Tāyumāṇavar was not a rebel but a pious soul who sincerely

wished for a universal faith under the *Śaiva yoga* cult. His hymns are, no doubt filled with great emotions, earnestly crying for the 'Union of Ultimate Reality' like his predecessor saint Tirumūlar.

‘Vallālār’ Rāmalinga swāmi (A.D. 1823–1874)

Next to Tāyumāṇavar, **Rāmalinga swāmi** emerged as his true successor in the line of Siddhas and as the last great saint poet of Tamil Nadu. There is no doubt that he belonged to the traditional *Śaiva Siddhanta School*. But, later he became a great mystic of Siddha tradition in theory and practice. He accepted Tirujñāṇa sambandar as his *guru* and paid tributes to other Śaiva saints as well. It seems that he was more influenced by saint Māṇikkavāsagar and his *Tiruvāsagam*. But, the influence of Siddhas on his life and teachings was greater than that of the Śaiva saints. Like Siddhas, he was a rebel who vehemently condemned the religious bigotry, scriptures, meaningless ritualistic ceremonies and evils of casteism as against the oneness of the souls of all beings. It is reported that he also performed some miracles like Tāyumāṇavar and other Siddhas who led the glorious life of immortality. He was conscious of the fact that he was unmistakably in the line of the Śaiva saints and Siddhas. He sings: “My Lord, do I not belong to the illustrious line of your devotees who flourished in uninterrupted succession like the plantains?” (TAP 3803).

Rāmalinga swāmi was born on 5th October 1823, in Marudūr – a village near Chidambaram, Tamil Nadu as the fifth child of his family. He lost his parents at the very young age. He was taken care of by his elder brother and Pārvati – the wife of his elder brother, who set him in the right direction when he was a mischievous boy. He learnt things by himself and became a self-master. In due course of time, he was greatly influenced by the lives and writings of the Śaiva saints especially of Māṇikkavāsagar as well as the Siddhas.

At his proper age, he got married to Dhaṇammāl the daughter of his own elder sister on the compulsion of his family members and friends (similarly that of Tāyumāṇavar). However, he soon left her as virgin forever looking for spiritual life. He was fully engaged in leading an austere life and in the realization of God.

At this early period of spiritual journey, he followed the tradition of the Bhakti movement but he went a step ahead to propagate the movement for a universal and common faith, in the later period of his life. Strikingly, Rāmalinga swāmi was keen on maintaining his position both as *Śaiva Bhakta* and *Siddha*. The close connection between *Bhakti* and *Siddhi* can be seen in the sixth *Tirumurai* of *Tiru-Arūṭpā*. He himself stated that the Lord had granted him a unique place in the galaxy of Śaiva saints (*TAP* 4800) as well as the Siddhas (*TAP* 4801). He was not only a mystic poet but also a social reformer. He earnestly worked for a common religion **Samarasa Sanmārgam** under which all people, irrespective of caste, creed and sex could take shelter and enjoy the divine bliss. His sect grew into a cult called **Vaḷḷalār Movement** (Movement of Philanthropist).

There was a real necessity for such a movement in that social milieu. The *Śaiva Nāyaṇmārs*, *Vaiṣṇava Ālvārs* and Siddhas like Tirumūlar, Śivavāḱkiyar, Paṭṭiṇattār, Tāyumāṇavar and their preaching have lost their strength of appeal with the people at later stage for several reasons. In hopeless situation, the East India Company, which came in on the pretext of trading, diverted its interest to grasp the political power of India and subsequently succeeded in its attempt. When it took over the power of ruling into its hands, diversity, poverty, ignorance, differences in caste, *etc.* were the order of the day. Education was not accessible to the poor, backward and untouchable classes of the society. The people of upper classes had suppressed them for centuries. Taking all these into account for its advantage, the British government, started propagating its religion 'Christianity' through the missionaries, with

the intention of keeping and exploiting India as a colony forever. The missionaries carried out their task in their own way of doing social services such as providing education, running free hospitals, orphanages, charities, *etc.* Though the upper class people were not attracted, even after the sincere effort taken by missionaries like Robert De Nobile (1577–1656), there was a good response from the lower classes and downtrodden communities since they were discriminated and in miserable economic and social status. Naturally thousands of people were converted. “Traditional Bhakti movement had to face another opponent also. In the 14th century, a Muslim Empire was established in India and the Kingdom of Bahamani Sultans and Vijayanagar Empire came to stay as neighbours as well as bitter enemies. The Vijayanagar Empire was at last put to dust by the Muslims. “The Hindu amoral cynicism had been crushed by the bloody and cruel conquest of Islam and definitely wiped out by the steely efficiency of its British successors”, writes Amaury Dey Riencourt (Annamalai 1988: 27).

Religious men of those days were not much worried about society. Without caring to do service, they were only concerned with their own, individual salvation. It may be relevant here to recall an observation of Sp. Annamalai (*Ibid.*, p. 28) in this regard to understand the prevailing dogmatism in the life of Tamils during the 19th century. He remarks:

R.R. Diwakar writes: Vedanta and its deep truths seemed to have slipped away from the consciousness of enlightened society. They were not thought to be facts of spiritual experience but merely conceptual notions and intellectual ideas. Spiritual life was divorced from practical life and they were thought to be inconsistent. Different schools of religious thought were intolerant of each other and there was enough dogmatism prevailing. Materialistic tendencies were getting stronger. A number of superstitions and social evils held sway [...] An atmosphere of inferiority complex [...] was prevalent every-

where. Admiration for everything western and worship of western ideals seemed to have gripped the educated people of those times.

Tāyumāṇavar, the predecessor of Rāmalinga swāmi, was more interested to propagate his gospel to the blissful spiritual life of people. It seems (as stated earlier) he had not attempted to convert his quest into success under any forum or institution supported by mass. Though he ran the *muṭṭ* (handed over by his *mauṇa guru*) for some years, he did not try to convert it as an institution to spread his cult successfully. So still meaningless ritualism, dogmatism and polytheism ruled the roost from which people were not able to come out completely and suffered subsequently, even after his pious endeavour. They were divided into sects, castes and gender. Though the aforesaid saint poets moved personally from place to place and advocated a meaningful way of worshipping, the result was not so fruitful. The saint poets of later period, particularly Siddhas had hardly had any close contact among them. But they voiced their concern for people only at individual level without any forum for action to carry out their mission successfully. Their propaganda was mainly wedded with *jñāna yoga* rather than *karma yoga* or *bhakti yoga* that failed to rescue a common man from troubles. In the scheme of things of Siddhas like Tirumūlar, Śiva-vākkiyar, *etc.* the human body was considered as a sacred one. They worked hard to convert their bodies as *yoga deha* by observing certain yogic techniques (Refer: The explanation of the foot note no. 2 of the Chapter-3, *Tamil Siddhas and Vīraśaiva Śaraṇas: Souls Searching for Ultimate Reality and Heavenly Bliss*), and sincerely preached it among the people. *Haṭha yoga* describes the methods by which one can prepare the body for attaining the *yoga deha*. When a Siddha attains this spiritual body he becomes a *jīvan mukta* i.e. a realized soul. Rāmalinga swāmi, as a successor of Tāyumāṇavar in the line of Siddhas, prays for such a *deha*, a *deha*

which will be eternal, everlasting and indestructible by any force on earth (*TAP* 5450). He was also equally emphatic in saying that he does not want to be cheated into thinking that he can attain *mōkṣa* after the death of his body. He sincerely felt that the liberating experience can take place only within a living body, which needs to be fostered rather than squandering it in vain (Ganapathy, *Op.cit.*, p. 125). According to Rāmalinga swāmi attaining the Siddhahood is not meant for performing any miracles but rather to live the life of a *bhakta* and live it to the full. “I desire not to die nor to continue this life; nor even to be born anymore. I desire not popularity to be known as great! Nor do I desire to perform any miracle to my credit (*TAP* 3400, Tr. T.D. Francis); I take delight, my Lord, in watching your dance in the Hall of Wisdom as well as in the Golden Hall, in singing and dancing daily and in making happy the living beings of this world” (*TAP* 3401, Tr. T.D. Francis). These were the self proclamations from the unique mystic Rāmalinga swāmi. In order to attain the true spiritual happiness, Rāmalinga swāmi, as a unique *sādhū* in the history of Tamil’s religious movements, happened to be the foremost saint poet who upheld and preached earnestly the greatness of ‘Vegetarianism’. As it was upheld as the perfect mode of union with the Almighty, that a man in the process becomes genuinely *sāttvik* (A person endowed with pious characters) by nature and steadily progress towards the state of *jīvan mukti* (A man attaining the state of liberation while living), as he really loves all the living beings.

Rāmalinga swāmi having witnessed a socio-religious and materialistic life (of Tamil people), that were devoid of spiritual wisdom, tried to generate the interest in the mind of the people for ultimately taking them to the new faith called **Samarasa Sanmārga Sangam**, which is of course not having any personal god of any form. This also helped to safeguard the native religion of the Bhakti movement. “When the religious institution fails to kindle

inspiration and promote unity and love among people, it is the spiritual faith that guides at least to a few to take to sincere efforts to reform religion instead of thinking on the lines of atheism” (Annamalai, *Op.cit.*, p. 28). Though he started his devotional life praying to Gaṇesa, Murugaṇ, Śiva, *etc.* in his formative years, at the final phase of his life, he realized that there is only one God. That one is formless. “It manifests itself in the form of light (**Aruṭ Perum Jōthi**) and therefore, It should be worshipped in the form of light only” (Iyengar 1981: 131). As the Siddhas emphasized for spirituality, they insisted for observing *yogic* way of life in which the body later on turns into ‘blaze of light’. Rāmalinga swāmi who has entered ‘Civāhood’ transforming himself into ‘light’, naturally visualized the Supreme being too as ‘*Aruṭ Perum Jōthi*’ (‘The Grand Great Light’) to be witnessed by one and all. Understandably, “he gave a central place to the play of compassion, in his scheme of life and he visualized the mystic vision of ‘**Aruṭ Perum Jōthi**’ as allied to the complementary power of ‘**Taṇip Perum Karuṇai**’ (Uniquely Sovereign Compassion)”, (*Ibid.*).

Every time I saw crop withering
 I withered too; as often
 As I saw hungry destitute beggars,
 I too fainted with hunger;
 The sight of chronic victims to disease
 Made me tremble like a leaf
 (TAP 3471, Tr. K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar)

Thus, assuaging the hunger of the poor is the key to the kingdom of Heaven, to Rāmalinga swāmi. He felt that for the realization of God, the ever-living disease of hunger of the people should be cured first and at the root level itself. If that is fulfilled, he thought that naturally people will be looking for the greater satisfaction; the satisfaction of souls. Accordingly he established **Sattiya Dharuma Sālai** (Universal Hall of Philanthropy) in 1867. This is the unique-

ness of his mission, where free food was offered to every one who was in need of it.

Before this institution, he founded **Samarasa Śuddha Sanmārga Sattīya Sangam** (Society for Pure Truth in Universal Self-hood) in 1865. The significant feature of the Sangam is that besides people who are admitted into it irrespective of caste and status, sex and age, others who lead family life were also admitted. It was not, however, Rāmalinga swāmi's aim any more than it was the Buddha's, Guru Nānak's or Rāmakrishṇa Paramahansa's – to establish an entirely new religion. He rather aimed at affirming and bringing out the throbbing warmth at the heart of all true religious experience. He felt strongly that caste, creed, blind custom, dogma, superstition, ritual or dialectics should not divide man from man, or raise barriers between man and God. He founded *Satya Jñāna Sabha* (Hall of True Wisdom), (presently amplified into *Samarasa Śuddha Sanmārga Satya Jñāna Sabha*) in 1872 at Vaḍalūr, and it was housed in a specially constructed octagonal building where the Ultimate was symbolized as *Jyōti* or Light (Iyengar, *Ibid.*, p. 135). It was designed in the shape of a full-blown lotus flower representing the human body, the temple of God. A mirror and oil were installed in the sanctuary. Seven curtains were put in front of the glass. They represented the seven *Śaktis*, the veils of illusion. Every year on *Taipūcam* (Special *pūja* offered in the month of *Tai* i.e. between mid January and mid February), the curtains were to be removed one by one so as to have a clear vision of the lamp in the glass, shining in splendour. The implication is that *Śuddha Śivam* or *Para Śivam* could be seen only after passing beyond these *Śaktis* of illusion. The method of worship, which Rāmalinga swāmi attributed to the *Jñāna Sabai*, was entirely new to the native tradition. Irrespective of caste, status, sex and age all people, except meat eaters (Non-vegetarians), were allowed to worship *Aruṭ-Perum-Jōthi* (Grand Grace Light). There was no chanting of

mantras, beating of drums, offerings like cooked rice, coconuts, plantains, etc., in his worship. In contrast to the Bhakti tradition of singing and dancing, there was a silent worship in front of the Divine Light. He advocated the method of worshipping in which the mind was to get rid of sorrows and agonies of life and to realize the spiritual bliss. “The *Sabha* was intended to be a place of prayer, where people drawn from diverse religions, sects, castes and creeds could transcend all doctrinal, adhesions and constraints and breathe the ambience of the Love Divine (*Taṇipperum Karuṇai*) and bask in the sovereignty of the Light Divine (*Aruṭ-Perum-Jōthi*). In his own culminating experience, Reality had come to him as the Light Divine at the heart of all creation, a Light feeding and fed by the Love Divine; and it was Divine Grace that compelled the play of both Light and Love. Thus, *Aruṭ-Perum-Jōthi* became Rāmalingar’s *mantra* of the *mantras*, the *mūla-mantra*” (*Ibid.*, pp. 135–36).

The Earth and everything, Rāmalinga swāmi thought, that were created by ‘the Grace the Supreme Light’. It has no beginning or end. After realizing it thoroughly, he claimed that he had become the permanent. He wished all human beings to be free from all man-made limitations and live in harmony and universal brotherhood.

O men of world
 who wander about
 attached to castes, creeds, religious doctrines,
 the hub hub of theology,
 quarrels about lineage and the rest
 It is not proper
 that you should wander about in vain
 and be ruined
 (TAP 3803, Tr. G. Vanmikanathan)

He truly worried for people, who had been misguided and divided into many castes, in the name of religions and God and described

them as the unenlightened ones (*TAP* 5566). For attaining the heavenly bliss, compassion was the only way, he stressed. So he was not for the worship of many gods that would bring divisions. At the same time, he was not for little gods that ask for animal sacrifice. When he saw the people carrying sheep, pigs, bulls for offering to these gods, he trembled and worried over their barbaric deeds (*TAP* 3472). As the most compassionate saint poet of the Bhakti tradition, he preached non-killing and advised the people to consider seriously for vegetarianism. He gave the foremost importance to this aspect in his mission, since he felt, that was the ultimate option left for realizing the heavenly bliss. There are reasons to believe that probably he could have gained this noble doctrine from Jainism and earnestly preached it in his own way. His sincere effort brought him some serious followers. It may not be an exaggeration if we say that whatever ‘Vegetarianism’ prevails in the present day Tamil Nadu that was due to his tireless spiritual hard work and mystic personality.

Rāmalinga swāmi thought that illiteracy could be one of the barriers for people in their spiritual journey of attaining Divine bliss. Hence, he founded a school called **Sanmārga Bhodini** (School for the Fellowship) in 1867. It was open to all, irrespective of caste, age and sex. Tamil, Sanskrit and English were taught in this school. Despite his good intentions, it is highly unfortunate that the school did not run for long. Naturally “he soared very high in spiritual realms but he did not shut himself in his seclusion. He moved among the people and rendered them medical care. The sanctuary for eternal service, established by him at Vaḍalūr, is a monument of his service-motto” (Annamalai, *Op.cit.*, p. 35).

The efforts of Rāmalinga swāmi to re-organize the Bhakti movement clearly show the social and religious milieu of the day, in which he tried hard, however, unsuccessfully. At one level, polluted elements that already existed in the Bhakti movement

were aggravated into a greater turmoil. At another level, Christianity and Islam, especially the former was rapidly spreading with a high spirit, mainly through its social service. That is why, it seems, contrary to the Bhakti tradition Rāmalinga swāmi founded institutions of social service like philanthropy society, school for the fellowship, *etc.* in order to abate and counter the conversion to Christianity, which was taking place mainly from *Shāṇars* (A low caste) of Tirunelvēli district, and from the *Harijans* of the other parts of the state. He was thus forced to reorganize the traditional Bhakti movement to challenge the Christianity and its popularity with the same tools that Christianity used to popularize itself.

Like Rāmakrishṇa Paramahansa in Bengal and Dayānand Saraswati of Western India, Rāmalinga swāmi in Tamil Nadu was also a prophet of the dawn of Renascent India after the darkness and bleakness consequent on the trauma of British conquest and the subsequent national humiliation (Iyengar, *Op.cit.*, p. 125). It is interesting to note that Rāmalinga swāmi was also a contemporary of Raja Ram Mohan Roy besides these pious souls. “Unlike those men, Rāmalinga swāmi hailed from the non-Brahmin circle. Like Dayānanda and Paramahansa, Rāmalingar had no English education. He was well-versed in Tamil and the bulk of his writings is in verse form. The support and sympathy of the public in the case of Rāmalingar were not so strong as in the case of the northern reformers as he was the poet of sovereign compassion, the apostle of universal love, benevolence and harmony. Further, Rāmalingar’s name has not received recognition outside Tamil Nadu. His writings, with the exception of a few poems, are yet to be rendered in English and other languages” (Francis, *Op.cit.*, p. 2).

It is to be noted that there were some similar movements like Brahmo Samaj (1828), Arya Samaj (1875), *etc.* which had been very popular for their radical social progressive agendas in other parts of India during the same period. “The fear of the Christian

missionary has been the beginning of much social wisdom among us”, thus observes K. Natarajan, the editor of the Indian Social Reformer (French 1981: 21). Another scholar Manickam, after studying the spreading of missionaries, concludes that the various reform movements, which have sprung up since the last quarter of the nineteenth century, were but the direct result of the missionary activities (Kooiman 1989: 21).

Rāja Rām Mōhaṇ Roy (1772–1838), who was born in orthodox Brahmin family, was the first Indian social reformer who took to such cause. While he was working for the East India Company, he came into contact with the Christian missionaries. His attempts were mainly directed to a fusion of Hinduism and Christianity. Interpreting the Vedas in his own way, he declared that ‘Idolatry’ was corruption of Hinduism. His major contribution to the awakening was his founding of “a church for the congregational worship of the one true God, where all sorts of people, whatever their denomination or creed, could assemble, where Hindus, Mahomedans and Christians were all alike welcome to unite in the adoration of their Supreme and Common Father” (Annamalai, *Op.cit.*, p. 35).

After studying Hinduism, Islam and Christianity thoroughly, “he soon realized that if Hinduism was to withstand successfully the onslaughts made on it by the Christian and Muslim missionaries and the rational atheists, it must be reformed and evil practices that had found their way into it, be eradicated. He, thus, discovered his life’s mission. It was nothing other than bringing his Hindu compatriots back to the purity of ancient Hinduism” (Suda, *Op.cit.*, p. 116).

Dayānanda Saraswati (1824–1883), the founder of Arya Samaj also observed the infiltration of western religion Christianity into the minds of Indian people, with great anguish and pain. “It (Arya Samaj) fought as much against the evils in orthodox Hinduism as against Christianity and Islam, which were taking advantage of

those evils to propagate their own religions and get converts. It also directed its attack mainly against some of the current ideas and evils such as multiplicity of gods and goddesses, idea of *avatārs*, ancestor worship, doctrine of *māya*, the caste system, child marriage, inferior status of women, fatalism, belief in *purāṇas* and *tantras*, meaningless rituals and so on” (Annamalai, *Op.cit.*, p. 32). In a way, Arya Samaj achieved success in its task. “The Arya Samaj founded by him (Dayānanda Saraswati) not only halted the process of conversion of Hindus but also started the process of welcoming into the Hindu fold persons who were earlier converted to Islam or Christianity or were born as such” (Suda, *Op.cit.*, p. 120).

Śrī Rāmakrishṇa Paramahansa (1836–1886) too was a radical like Rāja Rām Mōhaṇ Roy and Dayānanda Saraswati. “Great as was the full spiritual renaissance of Hinduism which Śrī Rāmakrishṇa brought about, his life and experience was a standing demonstration of the great truth of the underlying unity of all religions. He not only tried with astounding success, the various methods of realizing God as recommended by different Hindu sects, he preached with equal success the methods pre-scribed by Christianity and Islam. He followed the Christian way and had a vision of Jesus Christ; he lived and prayed for some time as a Muslim would do, and had a vision of Prophet Mohammad. In this unique way, he demonstrated the essential unity of all religions. He some times spoke as under: “I have practiced all religions, Hinduism, Islam and Christianity, and I have also followed the paths of the different Hindu sects. I have found out that it is the same God towards whom all are directing their steps though along different paths” (*Ibid.*, p. 129).

In a way, like Rāmakrishṇa Paramahansa, Rāmalingar could also have thought of demonstrating the essential unity of all religions in his mission. It is certain that Rāmalingar paved the way

for the Theosophical Movement in India. Yogi Suddhānanda Bhārati,¹² a great scholar who had spent a number of years in the Aurobindo Ashram writes:

The Theosophical Society is an offshoot of Rāmalinga's idea of one humanity. Sri Aurobindo's *Life Divine* and *Synthesis of Yoga* breathe with the important truths discovered by Rāmalinga. The descent of the Supernatural Force and the transformation of the human substance into the Divine was really an idea of Rāmalinga [...] Mahatma Gandhi fulfilled Rāmalinga's great passion for Ahimsa.

Rāmalinga swāmi seems to have been influenced by many factors of foreign religions. Islam, as believing in formless worship of God, probably could have attracted Rāmalingar to model his worship with 'the Grand Grace Light'. Further, the characteristics of Islam such as the silent prayer, formless worship and not offering anything (in worship) might have added to the culmination of his movement. The institutions of social service of Christianity too, could have played an important role in making his movement more socially committed and considerable to everyone. Regarding the cremation of bodies, Rāmalinga swāmi would not tolerate dead bodies cremated. He believed in raising of the dead bodies back to life. Strangely enough he speaks of the resurrection of the body and 'the coming of the Lord'. He seems to have borrowed these concepts from Christianity and Islam, as these ideas are new to the Śaivite as well as Siddha traditions. He categorically condemns the custom of people cremating in the following words:

This body of ours is God given. It is a crime to cremate the same. Although I warn you, you continue to cremate. The blessed day is at hand when the Siddha-Lord will raise all who are dead. Won't you understand this and see the reason

why the good people always buried their dead? You are like cows that are blind (*TAP* 5608, Tr. T.D. Francis).

Rāmalingar emphasizes that raising the dead is an eschatological phenomenon which is linked up with the coming of the Lord [...] It is quite possible that Rāmalingar had come into contact with the teachings of Christianity and Islam and borrowed these concepts from those faiths (*Ibid.*, pp. 60–61).

Do not be afraid my heart!
 This is the time for the Father to come.
 Do not doubt it any more.
 Keep on proclaiming this truth to the people of the world.
 Yours words will not become null and go void
 I swear on my God.
 It is certain that we will raise the dead
 rejoicing in the state of the great gracious form of light
 while being praised by all the inhabitants
 of this world, the heaven and the beyond!
 Do not be afraid my heart!
 (*TAP* 4875, Tr. T.D. Francis)

Naturally, due to such kind of proclamations of Rāmalinga swāmi, his fame spread all over Tamil Nadu and people flocked to Vaḍalūr from far and near. Orthodox Śaivites were watching the activities of Rāmalingar and the *Sangam* with suspicion and hatred. The opposition came chiefly from the great *Maṭāpatīs* (Head of *Muṭṭs* or Monasteries) of Tiruvaṇṇāmalai, Tiruvāḍuturai and Dharumapuram. Ārumuga Nāvalar (1823–1879) – an orthodox Śaivite of Sri Lanka, who was then in Tamil Nadu was restless over the activities of Rāmalinga swāmi. As instigated by the heads of *muṭṭs*, he started criticizing Rāmalinga swāmi for all his religious and spiritual activities. He was critical even over the name *Tiru Aruṭpā* (Holy Book of Grace) used to Rāmalingar's book. Usage of the term *Tirumuṟai* (Holy Supplications) found in *Tiru-Aruṭpā* of Rāmalinga

swāmi applied to various sections of the book, according to Ārumuga Nāvalar, were terms strictly restricted to the great original poetic works of Śaiva Saints like Tirujñānasambandar, Tirunāvukkarasar, Sundarar, *etc.* and could not be applied to works of saints like Rāmalinga swāmi. He felt that Rāmalingar's new faith of **Sanmārgam** gave elbowroom to other religions, particularly to Christianity. He vehemently criticized and condemned the book of Rāmalingar '*Arutpā*' (The book of Grace) as '*Marutpā*' (The book of Darkness).

Though Rāmalinga swāmi sincerely tried to bring all people into his universal faith more or less in the line of Islam and Christianity, he sadly failed in his mission due to various reasons. He was the disgusted soul who fully understood his failure at the fag end of his life in not bringing the people to his new radical faith. Whatever the impact/influence Rāmalingar once had on the people, soon started evaporating after his 'disappearance'. No systematic and serious attempt was made to spread the message of Rāmalingar (other than his Vegetarianism) among the people and thus to strengthen the organizational set-up of the Sanmārga Sangam in Tamil Nadu. "The Saṅgam gradually deviated from the main teachings of Rāmalingar by entertaining communalism and encouraging idol worship, particularly of the image of Rāmalingar. The attempts to bring together the leaders of the Saṅgam and Missions to work out a constructive programme of activities have not yet been fruitful. In fact, "many of his immediate disciples were not as yet ready for the quantum leap that would change the current egoistic mentality swearing by division and separativity and enacting inequity and misery into a new consciousness that would be wedded to the true Light and practice compassion and grace", as observed by Srinivasa Iyengar (*Op.cit.*, p. 139). To his dismay, he found that many of his followers were slipping away from the ideals of *Śuddha Sanmārga*. He

noticed a growing tendency among them to regard him as a demi-god. Rāmalinga swāmi condemned their attitude:

Please listen to me, ye men of Sanmārga Sangam. I speak, prostrating myself at your feet. Only consider me as one among you. Worship only the God Almighty. Do not speak in the fashion of people who profess false religions and spoil your wisdom (*TAP* 5452).

The undisciplined life of his followers and disappointing behaviour of people in general towards his teachings were most painful to him. In 1873, he ordered the *jñāna sabai* building to be locked up and he kept the keys with himself. After closing the *sabai*, Rāmalinga swāmi made his abode in a nearby village called Mēṭṭukkuppam. He stayed there in a small hut which he named *Siddhi Vaḷāgam* (Abode of Siddhi). Soon he decided to get absorbed in *yoga nittirai* or *samādhi*. On 30th January 1874, Rāmalinga swāmi delivered his final discourse to his disciples. He said (Francis, *Op.cit.*, p. 17):

Friends, I opened a shop but there was none to purchase; so I have closed it. I will not be visible to your eyes for a certain period, although I will be universally present in the world. My imperishable body will enter into the bodies of all living beings. I will reappear again at the proper time after having preached my message in other countries. Till then take to the path of *jīva-kāruṇyam*. Worship God in the form of light and attain salvation.

It is very unfortunate that, though the mission of **Vaḷḷalār** Rāmalinga swāmi strived hard to create a society for universal brotherhood, it failed in its attempt due to several factors. It may be relevant here to quote the words of T.D. Francis (*Ibid.*, pp. 79–80):

A serious handicap for the Sangam is the lack of structural and organizational set-up [...] The pietistic tendencies are

more dominant than the spirit of service. There is hope for the Sangam and the mission agencies to make their own contributions to the religious and social lives of the Tamils, if, like the Quakers they take to the spirit of service. By joining hands with religious movements which have similar objectives, the Sangam can strive to build up friendly inter-faith dialogue between them and work for maintaining communal harmony in the present day pluralistic set-up of the Indian society.

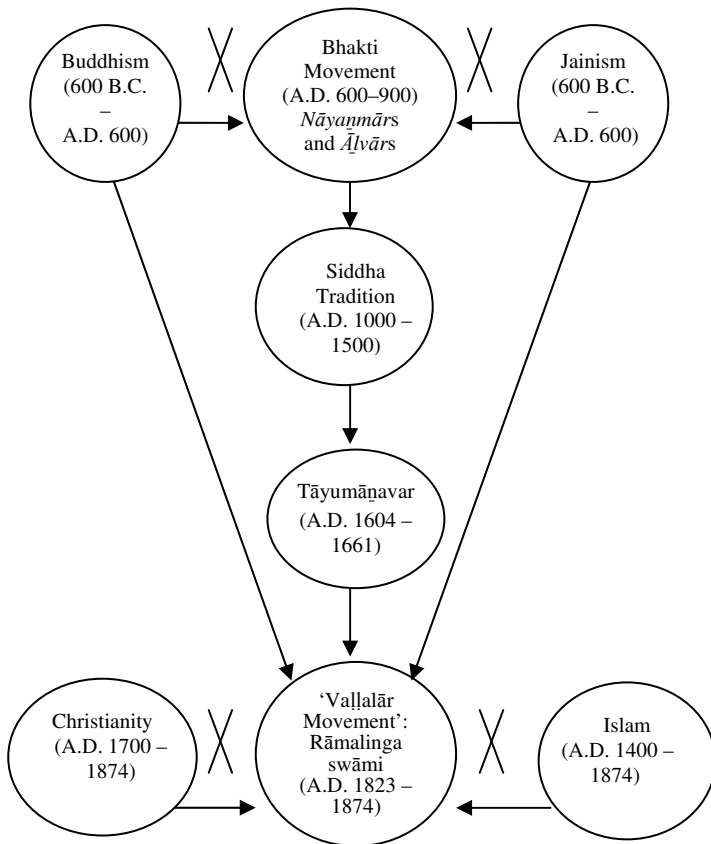
Considering the aforesaid facts, there is no doubt that Rāmalinga swāmi perceived the God and Religion in an entirely different way from that of traditional Bhakti movement, though not deviated completely from the ancient one. For the first time in the history of Tamil Nadu, he re-organized a religious set-up in such a way that all sects of people are united under one umbrella called **Sanmārga Sangam**.

There is a striking similarity in the way the medieval Bhakti movement and the Rāmalinga swāmi's movement have responded to the challenges that they faced at the time of their formation. Both had to face the new challenges from other religions such as Buddhism and Jainism in the case of Bhakti movement and Christianity and Islam in the case of Rāmalingar's movement. These challenges resulted in the formation of Bhakti movement on the one hand and reformation of Bhakti movement by Rāmalinga swāmi on the other. These changes were the results of adopting the movements to the most positive aspects of the respective religions, which they were countering at the time of their formation. In other words, like many of the salient features of Buddhism and Jainism, which entered into Bhakti movement, in the case of Rāmalingar reformation too, salient features from Christianity and Islam, besides those of Buddhism and Jainism, appear to have contributed in the formation of the new faith/cult. At the same time, in the case of Rāmalinga swāmi's movement,

we also find a striking similarity with other reformist movements from other parts of India. The very fact that all these modern movements might have been facing similar socio-religious pressures in the nineteenth century India, explains this similarity.

This entire dynamics of mutual opposition and interaction of religions became a repetitive model in the socio-religious history of Tamil Nadu and that has been diagrammatically perceived in the figure given below:

Re-organisation of Bhakti Movement



Notes

- * Revised article of the paper (bearing the same title) presented in the **“National Seminar on National Integration: Bhakti Movement”**, held at the Centre for Comparative Study, Telugu University, Hyderabad, on February 27–29, 1992.
1. The term ‘*bhakti*’ etymologically is composed of the root ‘*bhaj*’ and suffix ‘*kti*’, the suffix means ‘love’ and the root means ‘service’. Bhakti thus means the action of ‘*bhaj*’, i.e. service. In other words, Bhakti means attachment or fervent devotion to deity. The term stems from the root ‘*bhaj*’, ‘partake of’ and originally implied participation in a rite, sacrificial rituals *etc.*
 2. *Nāyaṇmārs*: (The holy servants of Śiva) 1. Tirumūlar, 2. Kāraikkāl Ammaiyār (Woman from Kāraikkāl), 3. Tirujñānasambandar (He who connected to the Sanctified Wisdom), 4. Tirunāvukkarasar (‘Lord of Speech’, more familiarly known as *Appar*, ‘Revered Father’), 5. Sundarar (“Revered Handsome one”, popularly addressed as *Tambirāṇ Tōlar*, ‘the Friend of Siva’), 6. Māṇikkavāsagar (‘He whose words are rubies’), 7. Ceramāṇ Perumāl, 8. Ayyaḍigal Kāḍavar Kōṇ *etc.*
 3. *Ālvārs*: (‘Divers’ into the qualities of God Viṣṇu/Those who immersed into the love of God Viṣṇu) 1. Poygai Ālvār, 2. Pēy Ālvār, 3. Bhūdāma Ālvār 4. Tirumālīsai Ālvār 5. Nammālvār 6. Madurakavi Ālvār 7. Kulasēkara Ālvār 8. Periyālvār 9. Āṇḍāl 10. Toṇḍaraḍippoḍi Ālvār 11. Tiruppāṇ Ālvār 12. Tirumangai Ālvār. (Poygai = Natural pond full of fishes, creepers and flowers; Pēy = Ghost; Bhūdāma = Monster: Nam = Our; Periya = The great; Toṇḍaraḍippoḍi = The dust powder of holy servants’ feet; Tiruppāṇ = The holy minstrel; other names preceding. *Ālvār* are either referring personal or place name of Vaiṣṇava devotees).
 4. Prof. P. Marudanayagam thus observed on Bhakti cult popularized by *Ālvārs* and *Nāyaṇmārs* of Tamil Nadu in his paper entitled “Speaking to Śiva: Māṇikkavāsagar and Basavaṇṇa” presented on 15th November 2006, under the DRS–Fellow Lecture Programme of the Department of Modern Indian Languages and Literary Studies, University of Delhi, Delhi-110007.

5. **Mahāyāna and Hīnayāna Sects of Buddhism:** *Mahāyāna* (lit. 'maha' means 'great', 'yana' means 'vehicle' or 'means of salvation') 'the Great Vehicle', a widespread form of Buddhism, most of whose scriptures were originally written in Sanskrit and which emphasizes the *Bodhisattva* ideal. During the first five centuries after the Buddha's *Parinirvāṇa*, a series of councils were held to settle controversial issues. The details of these councils are now uncertain, but it is apparent that new approaches were developing, some of which unacceptable to the School of Elders (*Sthaviravāda*, Pāli: *Theravāda*). One of principal schools of Buddhism, now represent mainly in Ceylon, Burma, Thailand and Cambodia. The first major division of *sangha* was between the *Mahasanghikas*, or *Great Sangha* party, and those who upheld stricter observance of monastic code of discipline, who claimed to be in true distinctive school of the 'elders' and were known therefore as *sthaviras*. The *Theravādins* claimed that theirs was the authentic and original form of the Buddha's teaching, as it had been contained in canon of scripture received by *sangha* at 1st council at Rājagaha immediately after decease of Buddha; they applied name *Therevada*, i.e. 'the Teaching of the Elders' (*Dīpa-vamsa* IV, 6, 13; *Mahāvamsa* iii: 40). The end result was a schism between the older schools, represented primarily by the *Theravāda*, and the newer ones, which called themselves the *Mahāyāna* or Great Vehicle.

The original differences between the schools seem to have been over relatively minor matters of monastic discipline; but before long new texts offering a new set of ideas were competing with the Pāli Canon. Written in Sanskrit, these "words of the Buddha" (*Buddha-vacanas*) were supposed to have spoken by the Buddha to close disciples but not made public during his lifetime. Those who accepted the new teachings regarded the older ones not as false but incomplete, a lesser vehicle or *Hīnayāna* (lit. 'small means of salvation'). What was meant by the comparison that *Hīnayāna* schools set forth a way of reaching salvation that had only limited appeal; it was not universalist in intention or scope, as the *Mahāyāna* claimed to be. The date of emergence of *Mahāyāna* is difficult to determine, but was somewhere within period 1st century B.C.–A.D. 1st century. Its universalist emphasis was reflected in greater place given to virtue of

compassion that had been the case in the *Hīnayāna* school, which was characterized by its emphasis on wisdom. The *Mahāyāna* emphasized both equally. Another characteristic feature of *Mahāyāna* was much greater place it gave to the *Bodhisattva*, as the ideal or goal of human life, towards which all men could and should strive.

The doctrines of the *Theravāda* and the *Mahāyāna* differ chiefly in their views of the nature of the Buddha and of the goal of Buddhist practice. In the texts of the *Theravāda*, the Buddha is a human who achieved *nirvāṇa*, by his own effort; he thus became a perfected being or *arhat*. On his death, he obtained the full liberation of *parinirvāṇa*. Freed from re-birth, he had no further contact with the world. Those who accepted the Buddha's *Dharma* could also become *arhats* by following the eightfold path. When they died, they too were lost to the world. To followers of the *Mahāyāna*, it was inconceivable that the Buddha could cease to be. His body was the manifestation of an immortal principle. This idea of a transcendent Buddha developed into that of the "five celestial Buddhas", and eventually into innumerable Buddhas; at the same time, the *Bodhisattas* or Buddhas-to-be of *Theravāda* lore evolved into heavenly bodhisattvas, "those whose essence is enlightenment".

Vajrayāna Sect of Buddhism: Around the fourth century, a new class of *Mahāyāna* texts began to appear. Known as *tantras*, these treatises were concerned with the power of verbal formulas (*Mantras*), sacred diagrams (*yantras*, *maṇḍalas*), and esoteric worship. Strikingly, this school had prominent place to use of *mantras*, or sacred chants, the use of which, in combination with mystical symbols and gestures of various kinds, was held to be most potent method of achieving more advanced spiritual states. Much material for such practices was taken over from popular, indigenous Indian religions e.g. magical spells similar to those contained in the Hindu *Atharvaveda*. Interestingly, the deities to be invoked were forms of the five heavenly Buddhas long familiar to the *Mahāyāna*, as well as female energies, called *Tāras* or Saviouresses, who had become associated with them; but in *tantras* these deities were visualised in terrible forms, similar to those of *Śiva* and *Śakti*, the terrible divinities of the *tantric* cults that began to emerge in Hinduism around this

time. In both Buddhist and Hindu *tantras*, the uniting of the male and female principles is seen as the source of cosmic creation. And since all divine principles have their counterparts on the human level, this process can be duplicated by properly initiated worshippers. The doctrines and practices described in the Buddhist *tantras* are known as the *Vajrayāna* (“path of the thunderbolt”), or *Mantrayāna* (‘Path of the *Mantra*’), or simply as tantric Buddhism. This became the dominant form of the religion until eastern India in the eighth century, and remained active in the region until Indian Buddhism was extinguished four centuries later (see for more details: Peter Heehs (ed.), *Indian Religions: The Spiritual Traditions of South Asia*, Permanent Black, Delhi-92, 2002, pp. 103–29 & 167–91. And also see: Trevor Ling, *A Dictionary of Buddhism*, K.P. Bagchi & Company, New Delhi, 1st ed. 1981, pp. 132; 183–84).

6. **Digambaras and Śvetāmbaras Sects in Jainism:** The naked ascetics were known as the *Digambara* sect. The literal meaning of *Digambara* is sky-clad. They went about ‘clothed in space’, (the term *dik* stands here for space and *ambara*, for clothes) impressing upon the world that they belonged to no group or community but to the whole of humanity and proclaiming that they had got over the last determining marks by casting off their clothes. *Digambara* is not for women to be admitted into the ‘Order’ (*Samgha*).

The *Śvetāmbaras* were the ‘white-clad’ monks (the term ‘*śveta*’ means white) and the white garment signified their ideal of purity; the catholic outlook of the sect is apparent. Not making any great departure from the spirit of Jainism they exhibited serious concern for decency. Mahāvīra tried to bring about this healthy change in the adherents of the Jaina faith as also the admission of women into the ‘Order’ (*Samgha*). (For more details see: S. Gopalan, *Outlines of Jainism*, Wiley Eastern Limited, New Delhi, 1975 (First Rpt.), pp. 21–27).

7. **Four paths of spiritual discipline for attaining salvation in Śaiva Bhakti:**

- I. *Cariyai*, which consists of external acts of worship like cleaning the temples, gathering flowers for the Deity etc., which constitute the path of the servant (*Dāsa Mārga*).

- II. *Kiriyai*, which is characterized by acts of intimate service to god, such as those that a son may render to his father, hence this is called the path of the son (*Satputra Mārga*).
 - III. *Yoga* which stands for contemplation and internal worship, this is the path of the friend called *Saga Mārga*.
 - IV. *Jñāna*, which means knowledge or wisdom constituting the path of the supreme god, called *San Mārga*, whose fruit is the ultimate end, which is the final union with god.
8. According to Buddhism, rules, vows, fasts and muttering of *mantras* do not help one to attain *Nirvāṇa*. The Buddhist *sādhaka* should not bow down to gods made of wood, stone or clay.
 9. Refer the explanation to the foot note no. 3 of the Chapter 4, *Basaveśvara and Rāmalinga swāmi: More Than Just Mystics*.
 10. Linda Hess and Shukdev Singh (tr.), *The Bijak of Kabir*, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1986, p. 102; Śivavāṅkiyar, hymn: 43), (As quoted by Ganapthy, 2004: 204).
 11. Ch. Vaudeville, *Kabir*, Vol. I, The Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1974, p. 239; *Kaḍuvelic cittar* - hymn: 4 (As quoted by Ganapthy, 2004: 204).
 12. Yogi Suddhananda Bharati, 1965, 'The Clarion Call of Rāmalingam', in *The Centenary Souvenir of the Sangam*, Madras: Samarasa Śuddha Sanmārga Sangam, pp. 129–30), (As quoted by Dayanand Francis 1990: 73).

Chapter – 6

Nandaṇār: A Dalit Merged in the Effulgence of Śiva*

Life is incomplete without ‘Union’ with God. It is quite natural that a matured mind and a receptive heart strive for this Union. Since long, philosophies were born, debates happened, music, art and literature evolved from this very need. Religions, philosophies, practices, customs and austerities have all pointed to one thing: Union with the Divine. On an average, the person who wakes up to suffering in his life wants to be free from it. For this, he looks to the Superpower of creation. The more he looks at the misery and shortcomings in his life, the farther away he feels from the Divinity which is his very nature. His heart yearns to establish contact with the Supreme.**

- Sri Sri Ravishankar

Literature is often called a mirror of the society. In a way, it serves as a kind of tool for understanding the past as well as the present. Sometimes some of the historical incidents narrated in literary works are re-visited, re-analyzed and re-interpreted from different standpoints. In the context of understanding contemporary history, some of the past historical events have been reconsidered time and again. When we question the validity of earlier literary episodes in the light of contemporary historical understandings, sometime the true value of facts might be brought

out. Any text or a literary work in a way is considered to be a product of a given socio-cultural milieu of certain region/environment. If a text of a particular era is studied at a different time and environment, it may not be imparting the same conceptualized meaning and message to its readers and observers. Naturally, it may raise altogether different issues and problems. It is quite interesting to see why certain texts or literary works get depicted again and again that too at different socio-cultural environments. Strikingly, in the case of Tamil literature, the episode of Ahalya depicted in the *Rāmāyaṇam* (which originally belongs to Sanskrit literary tradition) and that of Nandaṇār depicted in the *Tirumūrais* (Śaiva canonical literature 12 in numbers) of Śaivism have been re-analysed and re-interpreted by many Tamil writers. As a case study to understand divergent factors involved in the creation of a particular text, the present paper, in the theoretical frame work of comparative study, would discuss here the interesting episode of Nandaṇār, who is other-wise popularly known as **Tirunālaippōvār** – ‘One who’ll go tomorrow (to Tillai)’ to have the *darshan* of the dancing Naṭarāja of Chidambaram.

Nandaṇār: A Dalit Śaiva Devotee

The history of Nandaṇār roughly dates back to the 7th century A.D. Nandaṇār was one of the sixty three *Nāyaṇmārs* (the devotees of *Nāyaṇ*, viz. Śiva) of Śaivism and believed to have lived somewhere during the period between A.D. 660 and 840 Nandaṇār belongs to one of the outcast communities among the Hindus, the *pulaiyar* who live outside of the town and are mostly engaged in farming as bonded labourers. The story takes place sometime in the early stages of the history of *Aryanization* of the subcontinent, when the indigenous tradition and the incoming tradition were certainly seen as binary opposites. Sundarar (A.D. 840–865), acclaimed as *Tambi-*

rāṇ Tōḷar (The friend of *Tambirāṇ* i.e. Śiva) – one of the four pillars of Śaivism and earliest hagiographer, was the first saint poet who introduced Nandaṇṇār to the Tamil literary world. He, in his *Tiruttonḍat Togai*, (Anthology of Holy Servants) says: “I am the devout disciple of **Tirunāḷaippōvār**, the very embodiment of purity and virtue”¹. Since, Nandaṇṇār postponed his visit to Tillai i.e. ‘Chidambaram’ repeatedly, several times due to some unavoidable reasons, he has been popularly called by that name. Sundarar in his brief but sublime tribute to Nandaṇṇār stresses the mental purity of the latter. Other than this, there is no other reference to Nandaṇṇār available from the former’s statement.

A couple of centuries later, Nambiyāṇḍār Nambi – a great Śaivite scholar and compiler of *Śaiva Tirumuṇṇais* who was a contemporary of the great Cōḷa King Rāja Rājaṇ I (A.D. 985–1014) refers to Nandaṇṇār in one verse of twenty two words,² a little elaborately in his *Tiruttonḍar Tiruvandādi* (Great/Sacred *Antyādi* of the Holy Servants), furnishing some important information about Nandaṇṇār. Nambi mentions Ādaṇūr as the native place of Nandaṇṇār and his caste as *Pulaiya* – ‘an untouchable caste’, the social stigma on him as a *purattoṇḍaṇ* i.e. ‘a Śaiva devotee from the untouchable caste’, to worship Lord Śiva outside the temple. He also describes Nandaṇṇār’s visit to Tillai to obtain *Śiva dīkṣa* and his being worshipped by the three thousand strong group of Brahmins residing at Tillai. While Sundarar did not reveal the caste of Nandaṇṇār, Nambi mentioned that he belongs to *pulaiya* caste. However, neither mentions Nambi original name ‘Nandaṇṇār’. ‘The caste of Tirunāḷaippōvār seems to have weighed in Nambi’s mind more heavily than the original name of a prominent Śiva *bhakta*. Nambi’s cardinal point is that by shedding his ritual impurity and lowliness as a *purattoṇḍaṇ* while observing strictly his *kula dharma* – ‘the duty of caste/community’, Nandaṇṇār could merge himself with the Lord

and make himself worthy of veneration by the Vedic Brahmins of Tillai' (Kailasapathy 1970: 272).

Sēkkiḷār – a minister under the Cōḷa King Kulōttungaṅ II (A.D. 1133–1150) and a great hagiographer further develops the skeletal story of Nandaṅṇār and renders in 37 stanzas called *Tirunāḷaip-pōvār Nāyaṅṇār Purāṇam* (Legend of Tirunāḷaippōvār Nāyaṅṇār). In his great work *Tiruttonḍar Purāṇam* (Great *Purāṇā* of the Holy Servants), widely known as *Periya Purāṇam* (Great Legend), he elaborately sketches the life of Nandaṅṇār³ and makes him a unique Śaiva devotee among the galaxy of 63 *Nāyaṅmārs*. He is the first hagiographer who introduced Nandaṅṇār by his original name and spoke of the latter's life-time ambition of attaining Lord Śiva's feet at any cost.

The Legend of Nandaṅṇār as Narrated in Periya Purāṇam

Nandaṅṇār is born in Ādaṅṇūr – a village near Koḷḷiḍam river in Tanjāvūr district, Tamil Nadu. It is now known as Mēlanallūr. There was a colony of *pulaiyas* situated on the outskirts of Ādaṅṇūr proper. It is there that Nandaṅṇār is born. He lives in a hut with his kith and kin. Though somewhat a different person, he as an individual who wishes to live like the rest of his community by rendering communal services such as watch and ward, public announcements through tom-tom, removal of dead animals, *etc.* in the township of Ādaṅṇūr. From his early childhood, he had develops an inordinate love and attachment for Lord Śiva. Besides '*ūrppulaimai*' (Services rendered to village people), Nandaṅṇār is also rendering his hereditary services faithfully to the local Śiva temple. He supplies skin coverings and leather straps for making temple drums and bezoar *i.e.* *gorochana* for the worship of Lord Śiva. Overwhelmed with joy and ecstasy, he used to sing and dance in front of the Śiva temple, of course standing away and alone. He develops an intense

desire to worship Śrī Śivalōkanāthar at Tiruppuṅgūr and keeps craving for a glimpse of Lord Śiva. But Nandi – ‘the image of the sacred bull’ (Divine Mount of Lord Śiva) stands in his way denying him a full view of the Lord of Tiruppuṅgūr. The God who is moved by his compassion orders the Nandi to move aside in order to provide a complete view to His loyal devotee. With the miraculous intervention of the Lord, the untouchable devotee is able to have a clear view of the presiding deity in the form of *Śiva linga*.

After having worshipped the Lord of Tiruppuṅgūr to his supreme satisfaction, Nandaṇār goes around the premises, where he notices a temple tank which had fallen into disuse and was in a state of collapse. He decides to renovate the tank and starts to do all the restoration by himself alone. The Lord Śivalōganāthar is pleased with the service of the devotee and sends Lord Viṇāyaga to his help. Nandaṇār carries out his task with the divine help and completes it successfully.

He resumes his routine work at Ādaṇūr after returning from Tiruppuṅgūr. But soon he develops an intense desire to worship Lord Naṭarāja of Tillai. However, every day he consoles himself saying: **“I will go to Tillai tomorrow.”** In this manner, several ‘tomorrows’ pass on and his pilgrimage to Tillai is repeatedly postponed. The intense desire, an inordinate delay and repeated postponements earned him the parody-title **‘Tirunāḷaippōvār’**. At last, one fine day, he makes up his mind to visit Tillai and he could do so. On reaching the outer walls of the great temple city, he falls prostrate and worshipped the Lord of Tillai. But the thought of his *pulaiya* caste started bothering his mind and held him back from entering the temple. Over-powered by this deep-rooted consciousness of his ritual impurity and lower status, Nandaṇār goes round the city walls several times and for several days, weeping and cursing himself beating his chest and grating his teeth. His mind is constantly exercised over his accidental birth as an untouchable.

While he is in the state of great despondency and mental agony, the Lord of Tillai appears to the crestfallen *bhakta* in his dream and informs him of His divine plan for the latter's redemption. The Lord tells him that he would be allowed to worship Him from inside the temple in the company of the Brahmins and that he has to have his ritual impurity shed by going through a pyre of fire. The Lord also informs him that the Brahmins of Tillai would be taking care of arranging it for him to become pure and unite with Him. Subsequently, the Brahmins arrange '*homa guṇḍam*' (Vedic fire) for the rejuvenated *bhakta* to enter and demonstrate his greatness. With prayers on his lips and thoughts of the Lord of Tillai on his mind, Nandaṇār enters the ceremonial fire. Within no time, it is said, 'the unreal form of *aśuddha māya* (The *causa materialis* of the cosmos) *i.e.* the impure *pulaiya* body of the uncompromising *bhakta* is transformed/transfigured as a *muni* after burning to the wonderment of the Brahmins and sages. He emerges from the *homa guṇḍam* with 'the sacred thread of three strands dangling on his chest' and 'matted hair on his crest'. 'The three thousand Brahmin community of Tillai' worship the **Saint Nandaṇār** with awesome reverence. With effulgence and aura around him, 'the untouchable turned as saint' walks into the temple and 'comes unto the proscenium', and 'none see him thereafter'.

Agenda Behind the Portrayal of Nandaṇār by Sēkkiḷār

By narrating the story of the *dalit* Śaiva saint in this lively manner, Sēkkiḷār describes the social order of the day in which the former lived, when the concept of purity and pollution is strictly followed. It is the time when there are cries for casteless society particularly from saint poets like Tirunāvukkarasar but in practice it is just the opposite. Since most of the leading saint poets of Bhakti movement are Brahmins and *Vellālas*, there is no sympathy for the down-

trodden. The development of feudalism as well as the emergence of temples started during the period of Cōla Kings and Brahmins along with the land-owning people are exercising their powers to control the society in the name of religion. Sēkkiḷār sketches Nandaṇār as a docile, saintly and humble person. He presents him as one who conformed to social norms and never thought of transgressing them. The Śaiva devotee believes in performing the duties assigned to his community. So he discharges his duties without any murmuring or hesitation. He has faith in the theory of caste system and never thinks that he and his community are being exploited since the ages by the priestly and higher class community people. Sēkkiḷār, who was a minister under the Cōla King Kulōttungaṅ II (A.D. 1133–1150), was a *Vellāla* by caste – a dominant agricultural community. He portrays Nandaṇār as a seeker of truth and salvation and yet as an observer of *kula dharma* in order to safeguard the then existing social setup. “Persons, like Sēkkiḷār, in spite of their best intentions tried to perpetuate the caste ideology through popular literature either covertly or overtly. The social contradictions existing in his society were ideologically justified and explained away through literature, and no real change that would upset the ‘status quo’ was ever tolerated. Particularly, the uplift of the untouchables never formed a part of the Hindu scheme of things” (Kailasapathy 1970: 301–302).

Nandaṇār, as depicted by Sēkkiḷār, is not a rebel against the sinister practice of preventing and banning untouchables from entering the temples (Padmanaban 1988: 41) but as an untouchable, who is craving for *Sanskritisation*⁴ for upgrading his position. Probably, Sēkkiḷār could therefore have added ‘ār’⁵ suffix (‘Sir’) to the original name ‘Nandaṇ’ as ‘Nandaṇār’. Being an untouchable, Nandaṇār does not worship deities assigned to his caste but longs for worshipping Lord Śiva. While his fellowmen worship Kālī, Kāṭṭēri, Muṇiyāṇḍi, *etc.* in their own way by consuming liquor and

meat, Nandaṇār rejects and ridicules those practices. It seems, he sincerely wishes to get *sanskritised* at least himself. Sēkkiḷār, while describing the merger of Nandaṇ with the Lord Śiva, uses the technique of *sanskritisation* with great care by portraying him as a saint with tuft and a sacred thread and emerging out from the fire bath. “Nandaṇār alone, of all the sixty three *Nāyanmārs*, was made to go through the process of purification through fire to attain the status of a *muppurinūl mārbaṇ* (the one who had the sacred thread of three strands across the chest) and then to have merger with ‘the God Almighty’, who also appears to have adhered to *maṇu dharma* and upheld *kula dharma*” (Manickam 1990: 52).

‘Nandaṇār Carittirak Kīrttaṇai’: A Musical Discourse

In the 19th century *i.e.* after a gap of seven centuries, the legend of Nandaṇār sketched and portrayed by Sēkkiḷār was then developed by Gōpāla Krishṇa Bhāratīyār (GKB), (1786–1881) into a *Katha Kālaṭchebam* (Musical Discourse/Musical Opera) genre. He was a unique Brahmin who hailed from Narimaṇam village of Tanjāvūr district, Tamil Nadu who invited the wrath of his community for his magnum opus called *Nandaṇār Carittirak Kīrttaṇai* (NCK) narrated first in the year 1861/62. His version is different from that of Sēkkiḷār and others, especially in the use of supernatural elements to show the operation of Divine Grace. Sundarar, Nambiyāṇḍār Nambi and Sēkkiḷār have eventually highlighted Nandaṇ’s mental purity, thereby elevated him above his irredeemable social status and projected him as a metaphysical entity untouched by the material conditions of his existence. Having lived in the 19th century, personally witnessing the then existing caste system and machinations of power by the upper-caste Hindus, GKB re-historicizes the legend of Nandaṇār and sincerely propagates his progressive thinking through the stage performances. He seems to have

been pained much over the then prevailing socio-religious environment of Tamil Nadu and dutifully condemns the age old evil practices. He uses the story to criticize the upper-caste ploys to keep the lower castes in subjection (Thanks to the Britishers' efforts of social reforms relating to equality, education, and so on). He introduces the Brahmin, a detail not found in the earlier versions. GKB depicts Nandaṇār as a bonded labourer who is unwilling to tolerate atrocities perpetrated on him by a Vedic Brahmin in the name of caste. GKB through a powerful narrative mass media of that time viz. *Katha Kāḷaṭchēbam* represents the conflicting social order of the day, the high and low, the pure and impure through the characters of Vedic Brahmin and Nandaṇār. It was the time during which the landlords consisting of a majority of Brahmins had a control over the others, particularly the landless labourers.

Although himself a Brahmin by birth, GKB chooses to write and sing about an untouchable Śaiva saint who lived more than a thousand years ago. Because of his magnum opus in which eulogizing and making the outcast Nandaṇār as one of the holy servants on par with other Śaiva *Nāyaṇmārs*, people of his own caste condemned and banished GKB from their community. Despite their criticism, yet he continued to sing the story of the *dalit* Śaiva saint with true zeal and utmost commitment. In fact, people of Tamil Nadu widely came to know about the underprivileged Śaiva saint only through his musical discourse.

GKB's Nandaṇār is a 'slave *paraiyaṇ*'⁶ (bonded *harijan*) to a Brahmin landlord. His Nandaṇār mobilizes his own people to worship Lord Śiva. While mobilizing them, he finds favourable responses only from a few and others condemn him as if he were a disgrace to their community as a whole. The Nandaṇār of GKB, who is also in the process of *sanskritisation* like Sēkkiḷār's, behaves very aggressively and forces his community to worship Lord Śiva. Unlike Sēkkiḷār's Nandaṇār, the disadvantaged Śaiva devotee of

GKB wants his community also wholly to be *sanskritised*. When they hesitate, he even threatens them by saying that he would pin a needle into their tongues, if they fail to utter the name of Lord Śiva (*NCK*, Song 30). When he comes to know that his people try to get his mouth shut, through his landlord, he becomes very wild and tells them that he is not a slave to anyone except to the Lord who created and took care of the three worlds (*NCK*, Song 32).

GKB clearly demonstrates the social contradictions and tensions that prevailed between Nandaṇār as a rebel who wants to discard the religion of his community and his people, who want to follow the age-old religious practices of their caste on the one hand and on the other hand between the land-owning community and the community of land labourers. GKB portrays the Vedic Brahmin landlord as a person who is responsible for the postponement of the *dalit Śaiva bhakta*'s visit to Tillai. The Brahmin landlord thinks that the proposed visit of his labourer would directly damage his economic prosperity as a landlord and his community status, if the latter goes to Tillai without transplanting his paddy field. The enraged landlord rebukes the helpless Śaiva devotee: "Look O mad fellow! There exists no *bhakti* and *siddhi* to a *paraiyaṇ*. A Brahmin's God would not grace your community. Your caste is a polluted one. You should not continue your strange attitude anymore!" (*NCK*, Song 56).

Both Sēkkiḷār and GKB give a graphic account of the conditions of untouchables during the period between the 6th and 9th century A.D. *i.e.* the period of Bhakti Movement. "The supposed command of the Lord that Nandaṇ should go through fire-bath and reach Him for worship fits well with the then prevailing Vedic culture and prejudices. Whether a Vedic fire did take place for Nandaṇār has been for long a matter for speculation. However, recently some recorded information on this has become known although its age and authenticity are matters for further study and

research. It is seen from the engravings on the copper plate recently traced, that in *Kaliyuga Sagapatha* year 4501, *Yuva* year – *Aṇi* month 16th day, in Chidambaram, the 3000 *Dikshitar*s refused to take Nandaṇār in the palanquin since he was an untouchable, and that they could do so and take him to Lord Naṭarāja after his bath in *ōma kuṇḍam*” (Padmanaban 1988: 43–44). Sēkkiḷār, the Śaivite savant who describes the life and mission of 63 *Nāyaṇmārs* in the quest of popularizing the *Śaiva Bhakti*, arguably dwells on how Nandaṇār’s consciousness was attuned to the beauty and service of Lord Naṭarāja of Tillai.

‘Nandaṇ’: A Novel

After GKB, A. Gōpālasāmi Ayyangār and K. Ārāvamuda Ayyangār jointly wrote and published a novel entitled *Nandaṇ* in the year 1917. Though they didn’t deviate significantly from GKB’s version on Nandaṇār, they had introduced some characters in order to make the story more realistic. Perhaps, due to the well-established Westerners’ contact and its influence over Tamil society, the authors of the novel might have tried to portray some characters through which they could demonstrate the progressive thinking on subjects such as eradication of untouchability, treating people of all castes equally, the exploiting tendency of the landlords, sufferings of the landless labourers, *etc.*

The characters like Gangādara Śāstrigaḷ and Kāmeśvara Sraudigaḷ, Dīkṣidar in the novel represent the ideas of progressive thinking and conservatism respectively. Both Sraudigaḷ and Dīkṣidar severely criticize the proposal of Nandaṇār going to Tillai whereas Śāstrigaḷ whole-heartedly supports it.

While Śiva appears in the dreams of the Vedic Brahmins of Tillai and asks them to arrange the Vedic fire for the purification of the dedicated devotee, some of them even criticise the very inten-

tion of Lord Śiva. At last, they arrange ‘the Vedic fire’ and conduct the ceremony by the same Śāstrigaḷ who is supporting Nandaṇār, in order to save their face from the criticisms and convince the public.

Nandaṇār in the novel could convince the other *paraiyas* to worship Lord Śiva rather than their own ‘petty gods’. Some people like Mūppaṇ try their level best to convince the former to give up the very idea of worshipping Śiva and going to Tillai. They indeed become afraid against the intended visit of their weird fellow taking some people of their community to Tillai. They fear that their agricultural activities would be affected and as a consequence they would be living in the streets starving with their families. Hence, they even approach the landlord of the odd fellow Nandaṇār to stop him by any means. So the landlord acts on their request however unsuccessfully.

Contrary to the historical facts, the novel strangely paints that the dogmatic Vaishṇavism is more liberal than the popular Śaivism in accepting the untouchables like Nandaṇār as their equals in their religious framework. Perhaps the authors’ allegiances to Vaishṇavism by their birth do make them to do so! The authors narrate the sequence creatively in the novel wherein the dialogue that ensues between some Vaiṣṇavite and Śaivite Brahmins. This novel too depicts Nandaṇār as the unusual untouchable who really wishes to *sanskritise* himself as well as his fellowmen by worshipping Lord Śiva.

‘Gōpura Vāsal’: A Musical Drama

In Sri Lanka, where too the downtrodden were not allowed to enter the temple for ages, the well-known progressive Tamil writer E. Murugayyaṇ (EM) has come out with a verse drama titled *Gōpura Vāsal* (Gateway of Gōpuram) in the year 1969. When the movement for temple entry for the downtrodden was in full swing in Sri

Lanka, EM reviews Nandaṇār's story to represent the contemporary social problems.

Through a peculiar character *Sūtradāri*, EM narrates the story in the verse form. He has created some characters such as Vaḷḷi, Mūttār, respectively as Nandaṇār's sister and maternal uncle. Besides, the author also adds some more characters such as Coriyaṇ, as an antagonist, Cāttāṇ as a priest of the temple, a Vedic Brahmin and some *guṇḍās* (hooligans) who act against Nandaṇār. The author through the characters Vaḷḷi and Mūttār projects the good qualities of Nandaṇār. Whereas, he portrays Coriyaṇ, Cāttāṇ, *etc.* as the characters of ill-minded against the protagonist. The Vedic Brahmin (the Landlord of Nandaṇār) becomes infuriated over the strange attitude of Nandaṇār. But Vaḷḷi and Mūttār convince the former that the farmland labourer is not a rebel in any sense. They clarify that ardent the Śaiva devotee is indeed in the path of uniting with the Lord Śiva but not questioning the high status of Brahmins in any way.

Murugayyaṇ, the author consciously avoids portraying Nandaṇār as entering into 'the Vedic fire' and becoming 'a saint'. But uniquely, he presents Nandaṇār as immersing himself in the '*Aruḷ Kaṇal*' i.e. 'Fire of Grace' thinking of Lord Śiva in his mind and after sometime, in the process, he emerges out as an 'enlightened soul'. Thus, the author symbolizes the merger of Nandaṇār with the Lord in a subtle and metaphorical way. On witnessing the sincere devotion of the *dalit* Śaiva devotee, the Vedic community accepts him as a *pavitra bhakta* (holy devotee) who could be in no way inferior to them. The author convincingly has sketches the social discrimination that prevailed earlier in Ādaṇūr and got defused by the sincere devotion of Nandaṇār, of course through the character *sūtradāri*. He candidly essays the pathetic socio-religious situation of Sri Lanka wherein also the downtrodden people like Nandaṇār are not allowed into the temples during 20th century.

‘Nandan Kadai’: A Modern Play

Being inspired by the atrocities committed on *Harijans* of Kīlveṇmaṇi village of Tanjāvūr District, Tamil Nadu on 25th December 1968, in which about 44 *Harijans* were burnt alive by their landlord when they asked for proper wages and treatment, Indira Pārthasārathy (IP) has rewritten the story of Nandanār and presented it with his own interpretation. Re-interpreting the gruesome incident significantly, he has scripted and staged the play *Nandan Kadai* (Story of Nandan) in the year 1978.

Indira Pārthasārathy too, like his predecessors has taken GKB’s version of Nandanār story as the base for his work but incorporated some more characters. He deliberately avoids all supernatural elements found in GKB’s version. IP consciously names the protagonist of his play Nandan instead of Nandanār. He does not wish to add the ‘ār’ suffix, which is an honorific form to denote respect and esteem. In the preface of his play, IP mentions: “The ‘ār’ suffix added to Nandan by Sēkkiār, GKB and others, estranged him from the very cause to which he actually fought for”. The playwright implies here that the outcast Nandan was paradoxically robbed of his strength and power by being sanctified by the establishment. He evidently clarifies: ‘Ār’ is not an honorific but a cross to bear. This play narrates the tragic tale of Nandan who was outraged by social inequities, who for the sake of this honorific ‘ār’, for the sake of earning the applause of the *Brāhmin*, the *pārppāṇ*, perished in the fire”. According to him, “*pārppāṇ* does not refer to any single caste. Anyone who wishes to dominate, no matter what caste he belongs to, is a *pārppāṇ*” (*Ibid.*, p. xvii). Hence, the critique Indra rightly observes: “This sounds a little sweeping to me, for it amounts to reducing Brahminism to a monolithic idea” (*Ibid.*).

The legend of Nandan portrayed by IP is mostly in agreement with GKB’s version. However, the author significantly deviates from the latter at some places by adding some incidents and charac-

ters to demonstrate his own conviction so convincingly. Understandably, IP (as he is of leftist persuasion) is all praise for GKB for attacking the existing class and caste situation, although he was himself a Brahmin. His version as rendered by the translator C.T. Indira (*The Legend of Nandaṇ* 2003: 78–79) reads: Nandaṇ with his fellow men of Ādaṇūr lives quietly for some time by rendering some menial services to the temple. In due course, some changes take place in his thinking and behaviour. While his fellow men and women are happy with their tribal gods and the life of squalor and servile existence which they lead, Nandaṇ feels a deep discontent with the *paraṇiyan* way of life and offers an alternative vision of beauty and decency. This profound desire is voiced in terms of his ecstatic appreciation of the beautiful form of the Dancing Śiva in Tiruppungūr temple. He has also heard about the enthralling beauty of the form of Lord Naṭarāja (king among dancers) at Chidambaram temple and yearns for a *darshan* of the deity. As a *paraṇiyan* he is forbidden to enter the town, not to speak of the temple. He seeks the help of the *dāsi* girl (woman consecrated to the deity of a given temple in Hindu society) Abirāmi, who helps him to have *darshan* of the deity in Tiruppungūr temple and even becomes his lover in admiration of his aesthetic and musical sense. Nandaṇ persuades a few among his community to turn their backs upon drinking country liquor, meat-eating, sacrificing animals to their tribal gods and become ‘civilized’. The upper-caste Hindus who depend on the physical labour of the *paraṇiyan* for farming, begin to feel threatened by the rise of Nandaṇ as a challenge to their hegemony. To stop Nandaṇ’s meteoric rise they seek the intercession of the ‘learned’ Vedic Brahmin who is quick to see the pious orientation and spiritual aspiration of Nandaṇ and exploits them to Nandaṇ’s own disadvantage. Nandaṇ’s spirituality also poses a threat to the Brahmin community traditionally regarded as the enlightened segment of society. Sensing that Nandaṇ is fast

becoming a saint and is being worshipped as a healer too by the lay, the upper-caste men draw up a plot to trap Nandan in his own piety. The Vedic Brahmin puts forward the idea of setting up a contest between *Bharatanāṭyam*, representing the refined art of the civilized communities, and the tribal dance of the *pallās* and *paraiyaṅs*. He sets up people to act as astral voices speaking as Lord Śiva urging him to go to Chidambaram temple and bathe in the fire at the front, emerge as a pure Brahmin and then come for *darshan* of the Lord. Nandan is so far into piety that he is forced to take it as divine injunction after some initial doubts. The Vedic Brahmin flatters the high view of Nandan about himself in his unconscious. He persuades Nandan to submit himself to the fire-ordeal by self-immolation so that his glory will shine the greater for it. The Vedic Brahmin seeks the help of the Brahmin landlord for whom Nandan works as a slave. The landlord won't let Nandan go to Chidambaram without harvesting the standing crop in the fields. For some time now Nandan has been neglecting his farming chores in his preoccupation with propagating a new way of life. This disturbs the orthodox among both the lower castes and upper castes. The Vedic Brahmin sees this feature as eminently exploitable and fans the hostility among the *paraiyaṅs*, to Nandan's leadership and turns them into a potent force against Nandan. The plan is to make Nandan conduct *bhajans* all through the night while farmhands specially recruited for the purpose will finish the harvest. The Vedic Brahmin convinces Nandan that the harvest was a miracle performed by the Lord himself overnight so that his devotee Nandan may go to have *darshan* of the entrancing form of the Lord at the temple. Nandan falls into the trap tragically when he is further told of the dream which came to all the three thousand priests of the temple asking Nandan to purify himself in the fire in front of the temple and walk over to the sanctum. Although Nandan is a little frightened at this awesome prospect, he is so deeply

entrenched in the situation that he cannot now retract. On a chosen day, in front of a huge gathering, Nandaṇ and Abirāmi enter the fire to the trepidation of the *paraiyaṇs* watching the sight. The upper caste hail Nandaṇ as sanctified and canonized and call to the other *paraiyaṇs* to follow Nandaṇ, but the latter flee for their dear lives, listening to an inhuman wailing apparently by the burning Nandaṇ and Abirāmi. The play thus ends on this bizarre spectacle.

Significantly deviating from GKB, the playwright IP introduces some more Vedic Brahmins, some upper-caste Hindus such as *Uḍaiyār* and a *Mudaliyār* characters along with the Brahmin landlord, to establish his notion that Nandaṇār was cunningly got killed in the fire for which not only the Vedic Brahmins alone were responsible but also the other dominant higher castes. The Vedic Brahmin portrayed by IP is very cunning and clever enough. He overtly admits and praises Nandaṇār's staunch devotion but covertly succeeds in his attempt of destroying Nandaṇār to ashes with the connivance of the *Uḍaiyār* and *Mudaliyār*. "The playwright is interested in a deconstructive use of the Nandaṇ story and hence sees himself as extending the scope of GKB's use of the same legend to offer a trenchant critique of social inequity. IP introduces the characters of the Brahmin (Vediyar 1) and the other upper-caste Hindus, the *Mudaliyār*, and the *Uḍaiyār* as a departure from GKB's musical narrative. The intention is to show how vested interest brings them all together to halt the social mobility of the untouchables. All the upper castes whose interests are jeopardized by the rise of new leadership like Nandaṇ's are denoted by the author as Brahmins.

The landlord Brahmin orders Nandaṇār to transplant about 40 *vēlis* (250 acres) of land within a day and after finishing that work, he could perhaps go to Tillai. The cunning Vedic Brahmin hatches the plan and asks Nandaṇār to go home and do *bhajan* by assuring him that 'the divine grace' would do the job on behalf of him. The

innocent Nandaṇār believes his words. The Brahmin in no time arranges the fellowmen of Nandaṇār (who are already disgusted with his strange behaviour) to transplant 40 *vēlis* of land in a day. Nandaṇār is made to believe that ‘the Divine Grace’ helped him in transplanting the paddy field. By implanting a feeling of super confidence in Nandaṇār, the Brahmin encourages Nandaṇār to go to Tillai for worshipping Lord Śiva and to gain *mukti* (Salvation). He tells Nandaṇār that he had a dream in which Lord Śiva appeared and told him that Nandaṇār should come to Tillai and have a fire-bath for gaining the *mukti*. The Brahmin convinces *Mudaliyār*, *Uḍaiyār* and others and through them he spreads the same news, so that Nandaṇār could get destroyed in the fire. He also manages the Brahmins of Tillai to maintain the same to execute his ill-conceived plan successfully. Nandaṇār goes to Tillai and as planned earlier, the fire was lit. Nandaṇār is made to enter into the fire but he screams with great pain while being burnt alive. At this juncture, the Brahmin and others cleverly create a myth that Nandaṇār had actually merged with the Lord himself. They encourage the followers of Nandaṇār also ‘to get united with the Lord in the same manner’. However, the followers, understanding their evil design and truth behind their motive, ran away from the place.

Thus, Indira Pārthasārathy becomes the first creative writer to speculate that so called ‘Nandaṇār’s merger with Lord Śiva’ was actually a cruel killing meticulously planned and cleverly executed by the cunning Vedic Brahmin and along with other higher caste people. He presents the Master of Nandaṇ as a degenerate feudal landowner so familiar in colonial India unlike the Brahmin landowner of Nandaṇ in GKB’s version where he is an honourable gentleman. There are some more deviations from the version of GKB that could be found in IP’s play. As viewed by Indira – the translator of *Nandaṇ Kathai* (Introduction, p. xix): “While in the beginning he (Nandaṇ) is seen as governed by the reason and

thinking that marks any ideologue, he later rather naively succumbs to the ploy of the upper castes and accepts the commands of an allegedly astral voice which is heard by some of the characters. The problem I find here is the difficulty of deciding the author's intention. In a rational scheme of things, an astral voice is a deceit practiced on the gullible. It is therefore dubious even if it exists. But what about the inner compulsion of a devout person? India has seen scores of them: Āṇḍāl, Mīra, Tyāgarāja, Chaitanya, Kabīr, the *Sufis*, and in more recent times Rāmakrishṇa Paramahansa. Nandaṇṇ also sings in ecstasy several songs, soaked in the spirit of *bhakti*, and the writer brilliantly uses Gōpāla Krishṇa Bhārati's songs. But the author seems undecided about how and where to place Nandaṇṇ's genuine devotion and evolutionary aspiration in the socio-cultural and political scheme of things he has chosen to foreground in his play. Hence, the place and purpose of the *Tiruvācakam* songs, apparently anachronistically put in the mouth of the devout Nandaṇṇ but actually intertextually used by the playwright, are not quite clear".

While trying to point out why and how Nandaṇṇ suffered in his religious zeal Indira says: "The aspiration of Nandaṇṇ and the fate he suffers at the hands of the temple priests in Chidambaram may be understood against the cultural background of Hindu social organization. In the early creation myths of the Aryans who migrated to the Indian subcontinent as an agrarian and pastoral people there is the narrative of the cosmic form of *Vratpurusha* (Supreme, gigantic person) from whose mouth came the *Brahmins* (teachers), from whose arms came the *Kshatriyas* (Warriors), from whose thighs came the *Vaisyas* (Peasants and Traders), and from whose feet came the *Śūdras* (Servants). This is the hymn sacred to the Hindus, called *Purusha Sūkta* (Hymn of the Primeval Man) and is part of their ancient scripture the Vedas"⁷. It implies the divine origin of all the four groups of people constituting the community,

each assigned a particular function and duty. This is how a holistic view of society based on a higher principle had been conceived by ancient Indian. However, over centuries, because of several factors, historical, political, and practical, these four segments hardened into watertight compartments, impenetrable even by higher truth and light. It created what this play terms *jāti dharma*, the codes of conduct and values determined by the system of caste to which a member of society is expected to conform, observe, and adhere. It is also known as the *varṇa* system” (Indira 2003: Introduction, p. xvi)⁸. Therefore, the people, whosoever dared to challenge the Brahmanical hegemony in the medieval period, were openly punished to death by various means. “It is stated that thousands of Jains were impaled in the Madurai country”⁹, when they questioned the authority of the Vedas and the validity of the caste system. “The Jains who challenged Śaivism suffered persecution under the Pallavā King Mahēndra Varmaṇ I” (Manickam, *Op.cit.*, p. 49). Perhaps, in the light of these historical incidents, IP interprets Nandan’s merger with the Lord through the fire-bath as an eye-wash carried out successfully by the Brahmin and others. Strikingly, the play shows the institution of religion in poor light that too in unsparing terms because religion is put to the service of power instead of to the service of the soul and God. So “Nandan in this play wants to break this taboo, not because he is defiant but because he seeks spiritual knowledge and salvation, not to mention fine aesthetic sense. His attempt to enter the famous temple of the dancing Śiva at Chidambaram in South India and the unimaginable cruelty of the upper-caste people in martyring him are used by the dramatist to throw into relief what is happening even today to the Nandans in the remote corners of Indian society” (Indira, *Op.cit.*, p. xvii).

Present-day sociologists have documented how caste had not been a static system in India’s history up until the establishment of

British rule or Pax Brittanica (Srinivas 1996: Introduction, p. xxii)¹⁰. Since Independence, particularly in the last twenty years or so, caste has once again emerged as a vibrant factor in reorganizing the social dynamics of post-modern India. While there is a fierce competition to avail the government-offered advantages among the higher castes feel threatened by the challenges thrown at them by the newly emerging caste groups from the bottom of our society. Paradoxically enough *Sanskritization*, instead of forcing the emergent people to give up certain markers of Hindu life, has impelled them to affirm them more fiercely in the face of contempt from the higher castes. “We find very good illustrations of this point in the first Act of *Nandaṇ Kathai* when Nandaṇ tries to Brahminize himself and his clan” (Indira, *Op.cit.*). Through the play, IP tries to portray Nandaṇār as the untouchable who is really influenced by aesthetic feelings and aspired for complete *Sanskritisation*. In the process, Nandaṇār not only wears the sacred thread on his chest but also marries Abirāmi – the *devadāsi* of a temple to upgrade his status in the society. Because of this strange behaviour, he himself invites enmity from his own people and he is alienated from others. The cunning Brahmin succeeds in his attempt of cleverly alienating the strange untouchable from his people. Subsequently, he gets him killed by his continued brainwashing through which he made the devout outcast believe in his supernatural qualities. The crude social hierarchal system of India perpetuated in the name of *karma* brainwashes the lower castes to accept their status without any hesitation and to work for the welfare of higher caste people without expecting many benefits. This is acclaimed as their *dharma*.

It had been maintained that if a *śūdra* transgresses his *dharma*, then the result will be a caste mix-up, which will lead society to sin. If sin increases, then society will collapse, according to the *karma* doctrine. The doctrine seemingly advocates optimism and intellectual freedom, as stated in *Bhagavad Gīta* (6-5): “...the individual

person can redeem himself and improve by self-effort. Let him not destroy himself. One can be one's own enemy as well as friend" (Ishwaran 1992: 90–91). And "this may appear to be an encouragement to the *śūdras* to improve their position. But in reality, this illusory optimism belongs to the equipment of the Brahman ideology and institutional system. The *śūdra*'s efforts become illegitimate as soon as they cross the lines drawn by the Brahman social order. Those who stay within the line are assured of success in the next life, but those transgressing it in this life are threatened by the promise of a worse fate in the next life" (*Ibid.*). Accordingly, everyone is expected to stick to the occupation of his/her caste. He/she should refuse to look up to those things which can bring him/her better benefits and status in the society. If they are ignorant enough, then there will be nothing but disaster waiting for them. Misfortunes will torment them in this present and in the next births. Such beliefs, inducing fear, seem to have threatened occupational and vertical mobility for individuals within the Brahman social structure. The stability, even stagnation of society, rested on such suppression of hope for individuals. This is what seems to have happened to Nandaṇār who lived several hundred years ago. And the writers who all along portrayed him dealt with either accepting the aforesaid doctrine of *karma* or otherwise. Some writers sincerely question the validity of such evil designs and practices in which 'the minority exploiting the majority' is the norm and condition. In this regard, IP presents the story of Nandaṇār with all possible realistic elements.

‘Nandaṇār Ārāyccikkadai’: A Bow Song

Following the pragmatic portrayal of Indira Pārthasārathy's post-colonial approach, M.C. Jeyaparakāsam (MCJ) later essayed the age old Nandaṇār story in yet another popular genre known as *Villup-*

pāṭṭu (Bow Song). The title of the bow song published in the year 1984 is *Nandaṇār Arāyccikkadai* (NAK) (lit. 'Investigated Story of Nandaṇār'). This is a popular folk entertainment cultural program of Tamil Nadu which is known for its peculiarity and through which many contemporary social problems are presented.

When the whole Harijan colony at Mīṇākshipuram of Tirunelvēli District, Tamil Nadu got converted into Christianity in the year 1982, serious religious squabbles emerged in the society (Uthirapathi 1984: 74–75). In this context, MCJ re-analysed the whole story of Nandaṇār and dealt with the theme in a more realistic and rational way.

His Nandaṇār as well desires interest to visit Tillai but after getting a living picture of Tillai particularly about the description of *Āṇi Tirumañcaṇa Tiruviḷā*, from his landlord. After some days, out of great devotion, Nandaṇār goes directly from the field to Tirupungūr to worship Lord Śivalōganāthar. There he listens to a musical discourser saying that all sins and impurities of birth of a person would be wiped out if he/she decides to be an ardent devotee of Śiva irrespective of his/her caste and creed lineage. Being immensely influenced by the words of the discourser, Nandaṇār sits in front of the door-step of the temple. Because of his utter tiredness he sleeps for a while. At that moment, he is attacked by a ruffian with a stick and he faints. Nandaṇār regains his consciousness after sometime and to his surprise he finds the door of the temple is kept open whereas the sight is blocked by a bull which is lying down there. After a few seconds, the bull moves aside and at last Nandaṇār succeeds in his attempt of seeing the Lord.

When he starts dancing in front of the temple forgetting his lower position in the society, some higher class people start beating him. A Brahmin even orders him to dig the place and take out the soil, where he was dancing, as a punishment for his 'polluting behaviour'. Nandaṇār does so without any resentment. Convinced

with the impression that all his impurities are washed away after seeing Lord Śiva of Tiruppungūr, he is in a hurry to go to Tillai for attaining the *mukti*.

After waiting for twenty-five days for his landlord's return, he gets disgusted and goes to Tillai. While going, he meets the landlord on the way. The enraged landlord beats him black and blue on the spot and other Brahmins who accompany the landlord also join him and start attacking him with stones. They all leave him there and reach their places. The landlord, on reaching his place, finds to his surprise that all his lands have been transplanted by the companions of Nandaṇār.

The determined Nandaṇār somehow manages to reach Tillai. He goes around the wild fire for three complete rounds as required for purifying his birth's impurities. All of a sudden, some Brahmins, who are watching the strange man's odd behaviour, push him into the fire. With no body to rescue him, he dies in the wild fire after screaming for a while. When the fellowmen of Nandaṇār enquire about his whereabouts, the Brahmins tell them that Nandaṇār was merged with the Lord. Some people believe their words whereas others profoundly feel that Nandaṇār – their leader, was cleverly killed by the Brahmins (Jeyaprakasam 1984: 41).

During his period, the author M.C. Jeyaprakāsam has witnessed Gāndhijī (1869–1948) working for the total eradication of untouchability from the Indian soil. Also he has seen E.V.R. Periyār (1879–1973) – the great social reformer of Tamil Nadu seriously engaged in criticizing the caste system and dominance of Brahmins over other caste people. Periyār felt that the very essence of the caste system known as *varṇa jāti* is characterized by social and religious inequality as it is sanctified by the Hindu religious scriptures – the four Vedas, the *itihāsas*, *purāṇas* and *dharma śāstras* like Manu's code. Hence subsequently Periyār questioned and ultimately dismissed the very concept of God and the authenticity

of the Vedas and *purāṇas*. This unequal mode of social relationship indeed paved the way for untouchability. As Mahātma Gāndhījī puts it: “I consider untouchability to be a heinous crime against humanity. It is not a sign of self-restraint, but an arrogant assumption of superiority” (Young India, Dec. 8, 1920).

It is to be noted here that untouchability is not an isolated phenomenon. It is inseparable from *jāti* and *varṇa*. The division of the Hindu society into four *varṇās* is based on birth. It assigns the lowest status to the *śūdras*. Those who are not included in the four-fold scheme are *pañchamas* or *chandālas* against whom untouchability is being practiced and atrocities committed. So, without abolishing *varṇa jāti* as Periyār felt untouchability cannot be effectively abolished. Therefore, Periyār raised his voice, even while he was in the Indian National Congress Party, against *varṇa dharma* and the scriptures that sanctify it, when the Tamil Nadu Congress Committee met at Tiruppūr, a town near Coimbatore in Tamil Nadu in 1922. It was due to the Western ideas of ‘Liberty, Equality and Fraternity’ introduced in the 19th century by colonial rulers, the spread of liberal education by Christian missionaries and the propagation of the theory that “Brahmins were not indigenous to South India”, have led to large-scale conversion to Christianity by *dalits*, which they believed could prove an outlet to them from caste tyranny. This ultimately paved the way for the emergence of the Reformist Movement founded by E.V. Rāmasāmy in Tamil Nadu, and the ‘Hindu Reformist Movement’ launched by Nārāyaṇa Guru in Kerala. In spite of their attempts, the caste system continued to have its own existence in the society. However, due to the influence of reformatory ideas and related activities from the great social reformers like Mahātma Jōthiba Phūle, Śrī Nārāyaṇa Guru, Periyār E.V. Rāmasāmy, B.R. Āmbēḍkar, *etc.* some writers with modern thinking started voicing their critical views in their literary creations. In such an attempt, several writers have reviewed and re-

created the Nandaṇār episode in different literary genres from different ideological positions. In this trend, under the inspiration of existing Nandaṇār stories, Pudumaippittan̄ (1906–1948) – the doyen of the Tamil short story genre, wrote a story entitled *Pudiya Nandaṇ* (New Nandaṇ) sometime before 1948.

‘Pudiya Nandaṇ’: A Short Story

Pudumaippittan̄ (PP) narrates his short story in the present geographical set up of Ādaṇūr where Nandaṇār once lived. He depicts different characters who are more or less reflecting Nandaṇār to represent the social menace of untouchability. Pāvāḍai – the son of Karuppan̄, a *Harijan* by caste, gets educated with the help of a ‘Christian Father’ and becomes a Christian. It is after the conversion that his name Pāvāḍai changes to Daniel John. When he proposes to marry the daughter of that Christian Father, who was originally a *Veḷḷāla* by caste, he is ridiculed and rejected outright. In course of time, the frustrated ‘Daniel John’ joins ‘the Self-Respect Movement’ (established in 1925) of E.V.R. Periyār and changes his name as Narasingam. After some period, when he returns to his native village, he notices the differences between himself and the people of his community in all respects.

Rāmanāthaṇ̄ – the progressive Brahmin youth, who is attracted by the Gandhian Movement, develops a relationship with the younger sister of Pāvāḍai (now Narasingam). He, though being the son of a conservative *Sraudi* (a Brahmin), seeks the permission of Karuppan̄, the father of Pāvāḍai, for marriage. Karuppan̄, the blind old man could not even imagine the feasibility of Rāmanāthaṇ̄’s proposal which finally gets rejected by him.

When Karuppan̄ is about to be run over by a motor car from a procession during Gāndhijī’s visit to his village, both Pāvāḍai and Rāmanāthaṇ̄ run to his help. Not only they fail to save the blind old man but they also lose their lives in their action. All the three are

crushed under the wheels of the car and their blood gets mingled. Thus Pudumaippittan (1947: 53) at the end of the story asks: “Whom should we call Nandaṇ among them? The two people have seen the light in two different ways. Is it possible at least after the death?” Here the writer portrays the Gāndhiyan Movement and E.V.R. Periyār’s Self-Respect Movement respectively with Rāma-nāthan and Pāvāḍai. He critically reviews the situation in which both the movements could not succeed in their attempts of saving the down-trodden for various reasons.

True to his style, PP portrays the crude reality of then existing society in the short story. When people had the feeling that by conversion to Christianity one can obtain social status, the author presents a situation where one can’t claim the social status simply because of his/her education and conversion to another religion. He sincerely views that though some of the Hindus got converted to other religions for various reasons, they were indeed not free from the clutches of their own caste and community.

‘Kindaṇ Carittiram’: A Musical Discourse

Nagercoil Suḍalaimuthu Krishṇaṇ¹¹ (NSK) (1908–1957) – the greatest comedian of yester year’s Tamil Cinema popularly known as *Kalaivāṇar* (Superb Artist) for his sense of humour and serious thinking on social problems, similar in the line of Pudumaippittan, also tried to present the story of Nandaṇār with a different perspective and agenda. But before his novel attempt, there were three Tamil films made on the story of Nandaṇār with different artists within less than ten years of gap (1933–1942).¹² Aiming to preach the ideal notion of the importance of education for the eradication of untouchability in the similar genre of *Nandaṇār Carittirak Kīrttaṇai* of GKB, NSK staged a *Katha Kālaṭchēbam* (Musical Discourse) called *Kindaṇ Carittiram* (Story of Kindaṇ)

sometime after 1948. In what could be termed as a grim reflection of the pathetic social condition that existed then, the story immensely attracted the people of Tamil Nadu even while fighting with British armies for independence. So impressed by the theme of Nandaṇār' story, NSK symbolically presented it by performing the musical discourse '*Kindaṇ Carittiram*' several times at various places of Tamil Nadu. In his attempt, like Pudumaippittan, he changed the names of characters while depicting the story in the geographical background of Ādaṇur, the village of Nandaṇār.

Kindaṇ – the protagonist of his musical discourse also hails from a Harijan community of Ādaṇūr. He wants to go to Madras (Chennai) for higher education. He approaches his school teacher for help. The teacher condemns his thought and tells him to take up some job in his own village. The father of Kindaṇ also advises him not to cherish the desire which was unusual and unwarranted to their community. But later he gives his consent on realizing the determination of his son. After undergoing several difficulties, Kindaṇ succeeds in his mission with the help of a college principal. Some years later, after completing his education, he returns to his native place as an Education Officer. The same school teacher receives him at the Railway Station. He embraces and congratulates him over his success and openly expresses his feeling of pride over his achievement.

Through the musical discourse, NSK tries to demonstrate his belief that education could certainly bring due importance and proper honour to any person irrespective of his/her gender, caste, economic condition, *etc.*

Post-Scripts

Thus, from the 8th century A.D. till recently, the story of Nandaṇār has been subjected to creation and recreation by poets, musicians and writers with several interpretations. "There is a past in the

present. Learning from history helps us to understand the present better” (Deepak Nayyar)¹³; “History is the torch that is meant to illuminate the past, to guard us against the repetition of mistakes of other days (Claud G. Bowers). Lenin said history is a cruel step-mother and when it retaliates it stops at nothing. If we fail to learn from history we are doomed to repeat our mistakes” (Thiruvengadam).¹⁴ These observations seem to be fitting while analyzing the portrayal of Nandaṇār by several authors of different genres. It is interesting to note that there is a gap between the 13th century and 18th century (Period of *Prabhandas*) in the literary attempt and of other genres on the story of Nandaṇār, whereas numerous interpretations of the story of Nandaṇār are available in the 20th century, particularly in the post-independence period. In this context, one can enquire why the story has been re-created and re-interpreted by several writers, particularly in the 20th century. And also one can ask why the story has been so popularized again and again through the popular entertainment media such as opera, musical discourse, bow songs and plays. It is clear that the caste hierarchy related problems still strived to live even after proper education, that too after independence, for which every caste and community are contributing. Of course, it could be overtly due to the commitment of writers’ wishes of creating social awareness in people to eradicate caste and community feelings and to encourage them for school education. But covertly, it appears that their attempts may be due to their urge for getting appreciation and reward from the public by portraying Nandaṇār in such a way that in their writings, Nandaṇār, as an untouchable questions the social establishment.

Further, it appears that the writers with social awareness whenever they come to know about the atrocities done to the down-trodden, start reviewing the story of Nandaṇār in their own ideological background and position. Thus, in the 20th century, Nanda-

nār is seen not merely as a *harijan* who aspires for *sanskritisation* for himself because of his social awareness, but as an untouchable who consciously wants to *sanskritise* himself along with his fellowmen. The Nandanār portrayed in the 20th century Tamil literature wants to be educated and question the social system in which the downtrodden are exploited and ill-treated and also prevented from getting education and gaining entry into the temples. As a whole, Nandanār has been recreated as the only hero who wishes to solve all the contemporary social problems of the downtrodden people.

It is interesting to note that the writers namely Sundarar, Nambiyāṇḍār Nambi, Gōpāla Krishṇa Bhāratīyār, A. Gōpālasāmi Ayyangār, K. Ārāvamuda Ayyangār and Indira Pārthasārathy) – who have essayed Nandanār story divergently – are happened to be Brahmins and others such as Sēkkiḷār, Pudumaippittan, and N.S. Krishṇan are *Vellāḷas* (A higher class land-owning community) by their caste lineage. Obviously, one can question why all (except MCJ and EM as their caste lineage is not known) the writers of higher castes such as Brahmins and *Vellāḷas* bothered much about the untouchable Nandanār and why they recreated him again and again. Of course, one can find a reason that they were the people who underwent modern education and have been claimed to be the leaders in the field of Arts and Culture. Are there other reasons?

It is also interesting to see that there are degrees of differences in portraying the story of Nandanār. Some writers such as Sēkkiḷār, G.K. Bhāratīyār and Gōpālasāmi Ayyangār & Ārāvamuda Ayyangār depict Nandanār voluntarily entering the Vedic fire, whereas the Nandanār of Indira Pārthasārathy enters the same obviously after he was thoroughly brainwashed. M.C. Jeyaprakāsam in his bow song portrays Nandanār being cunningly pushed into the fire by the Brahmins while he was going around it. The other author E. Murugayan in his play depicts Nandanār as not entering the real fire but

metaphorically ‘the fire, the *bhakti*’. While G.K. Bhāratīyār presents the Vedic Brahmin landlord as the only antagonist with evil intentions towards Nandaṇār. Indira Pārthasārathy, the playwright of *Nandaṇ Kathai*, brings representatives of other dominant landlord communities such as *Uḍaiyār* and *Mudaliyār* along with the Brahmin landlord and a cunning Vedic Brahmin as opponents of Nandaṇār. E. Murugayyaṇ portrays Coriyaṇ, Cāttan and some *guṇḍas* along with the usual Brahmin landlord as enemies of Nandaṇār. M.C. Jeyaprakāsam depicts some higher caste people and a ruffian as villains besides the Brahmin landlord.

In the light of the above analysis, one may tend to ask the following questions:

- * Is it the intention of the authors of higher castes to project Nandaṇār as an untouchable who wanted to question the atrocities of upper castes on his community?
- * Is it because the *Brahmin* and *Vellāḷa* authors wanted to project themselves as really progressive people and wished to encash skillfully by exploiting the popular genres (bringing fame and cash) such as musical discourse, bow song, stage plays, and of course cinema for their rendered jobs? (It is to be noted here that only one novel is written so far on the legend of Nandaṇār).
- * Is it a conscious attempt by these authors to blunt the edge of the blame exclusively on the Brahmins by making *Vellāḷas* and some down-trodden equally responsible for the elimination of Nandaṇār?
- * It would be better if we conclude by saying that this discussion will lead to a new dimension only when a different version of Nandaṇār’s story comes from a *dalit* author, who lives in a village and has personally experienced the suffocative and traumatic ill-treatment at the hands of so-called higher caste people.

Notes

- * Revised article of the paper presented in the Eighth World Tamil Conference held at Tanjavur, Tamil Nadu during 1–5, January 1995.

My thanks to Prof. P. Marudanayagam (former Director, Pondicherry Institute of Linguistics and Culture, Pondicherry), for his inputs to complete this paper on Nandanār.

- ** Sri Sri Ravishankar, ‘Why You Shouldn’t Look for Super humans in Avatars’, in ‘The Speaking Tree’ column, *The Times of India*, New Delhi Edition, Dated 02.09.2006.

1. *cemmaiye tirunālaip pōvārkum aḍiyēṇ*
(Sundarar, *Tiruttonḍat togai*, hymn 3, line 3.
2. *nāvār pugalttillai ambalat tāṇaruḷ perrunālaip*
pōvā navaṇām purattirut toṇḍantaṇ puṇpulaipōy
mūvā yiravarkai kūppa muṇiyāya vaṇpadidāṇ
māvār poḷiltigal āḍaṇūr eṇbarim maṇḍalattē
(Nambiyāṇḍār Nambi, *Tiruttonḍar Tiruvandādi*, hymn 20.
3. Sēkkiḷār, ‘Tirunālaippōvār Nāyaṇār Purāṇam’, in ***Periya Purāṇam***.
4. Sanskritisation is the process by which a ‘low’ Hindu caste, or tribal or other group, changes its customs, rituals, ideology, and way of life in the direction of a high, and frequently, ‘twice-born’ caste.
(Cf. M.N. Srinivas, *Social Change in Modern India*, p. 6.)
5. ‘*Ār*’: In Tamil the suffix ‘*ār*’ indicates respect and reverence for a person when it is appended to his or her name.
6. The word *paraiyaṇ* is a Tamil noun (derived from the word *parai* meaning the drum) which is being rendered as ‘Pariah’ in English. But, the additional dose of contempt (meant in the Tamil word) when uttered by a high-caste Hindu is not carried in the latter’s case.
7. A.L. Basham, *The Origins and Development of Classical Hinduism*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1989, p. 25 (As quoted by C.T. Indira 2003: xvi).
8. *Varṇa* means colour and historians tell us that the fair-skinned Aryans (migrating from Iran and Asia Minor) found the indigenous people in the Indus Valley region dark. From this gradually evolved the caste system, which regulated interaction and intercourse among the Aryan and non-Aryan people of India. The system came to be called *chatur varṇa* (four colours) because it identified four stratas of people in

society. However, there were people who lived on the fringes of society who were not covered by the *varṇa* system (they were *avarṇa*, without *varṇa* or regulations). People living within the system scarcely had anything to do with them except to assign to them the task of tending graves or cremation grounds, over a long period there arose a certain blurring of distinctions between the fourth caste (who were still within the fold of the *varṇa* system) and those who were outside its pale.

(Cf. C.T. Indira, *The legend of Nandan - Nandan Kathai*, p. xvi.)

9. Madras District Gazetteers: Madurai, Edited by B.S. Baliga, Madras, Vol. I, pp. 74 and 297.
(Cf. B. Manickam, *Nandaṇaar the Dalit Martyr*, p. 49.)
10. *Caste and its Twentieth Century Avatar*, ed. and introduced by M.N. Srinivas, Penguin Book India, New Delhi, 1997 (first published by Viking, 1996), (As quoted by C.T. Indira, 2003: Introduction, xxii).
11. N.S. Krishṇaṇ (1908–1957), popularly known as *Kalaivāṇar* among the people of the Tamil Nadu, was one of the finest comedian the Indian Cinema has ever seen. He sincerely believed that films should convey some message to its audience and accordingly acted in films. Thereby he became a darling of Tamil filmgoers.
12. On Nandanār episode, there were three films made in the years 1933, 1935 and 1942. Nandanār was the first Tamil film that was a non-mythological. It narrated the life of a humble farm worker from a downtrodden caste who became saint through his devotion to Lord Śiva. Nandanār dealt with two important aspects of the state of society then, and now – untouchability, scant respect for Harijans and entry of Harijans into temples. This film gave rise to a genre of films based on the lives of saints. In mythologicals, most of the characters were gods, but the films on saints attracted a lot of people too since they dealt with people, from all wall walks of life, who attained the something everybody just wishes for, the feet of the Lord. The film was produced by New Theatres in 1933 and later Assandas Classical Talkies filmed Nandanār's story in 1935, casting the famous female singer K.B. Sundarāmbāl as Nandanār in a male role. But, both movies evoked lukewarm response from the movie going public. Yet another film on this saint was made by Gemini in 1942. K.B. Sunda-

rāmbā] was paid an astronomical amount for this film, rumoured to be about One lakh rupees.

13. Prof. Deepak Nayyar, former Vice-Chancellor of University of Delhi, stated so while releasing a new book, *India: Historical Beginnings and the Concept of the Aryan*, on 06.09.2006 (News column appeared in Hindu News Paper, New Delhi Edition, Dated: 08.09.2006, p. 2).
14. A.T. Thiruvengadam quoted in 'Open Page Column', *The Hindu*, New Delhi Edition, Dt. May 10, 2005, p. 17.

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BEYOND BHAKTI: STEPS AHEAD . . .

Much has been written on Tamil Bhakti Movement and on its literature by scholars with divergent agendas. However, the present work tries to highlight the aspects of 'beyond bhakti', i.e. other than the so-called Bhakti sentiments and rituals. It attempts to study the unique bhakti sentiment of folk people with the first hand knowledge and information to highlight its specific nature. To our interest, the book questions certain aspects of age old socio-cultural conventions of South India, documented in the Śaiva Bhakti literature and earnestly exposes its flaws by citing the relevant facts and figures. It also analyses the common features of the Vīraśaiva Śaraṇas of Karnataka and Siddhas of Tamil Nadu in general and Basaveśvara and Rāmalinga swāmi in particular. Though briefly but diligently, it establishes the emergence of latter's "Vallalār Movement" (19th Century) as the socio-religious institution remodelled with the exact agendas of the "Bhakti Movement" (A.D. 600–900) to curtail the spreading of alien religions such as Christianity and Islam in Tamil Nadu. Further it extensively reviews the myth of one peculiar Śaiva Dalit Nāyaṇār called Nandaṇār to understand the past as well as the present socio-cultural issues of Tamil Nadu.

[This book is the Paperback edition of the same title (Hardbound) published in the year 2007 by B. R. Publishing Corporation, Delhi-110052]



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SUN INTERNATIONAL PUBLISHERS

PG-105, Possangipur, Janakpuri,
New Delhi - 110 058 (India)

Email: suninternational1989@gmail.com

Price: ₹ 495

ISBN 978-81-928130-3-5

